

JOHN BUTT



Bach's Dialogue with Modernity

Perspectives on the Passions

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Bach's Dialogue with Modernity

Providing a detailed analysis of both Bach Passions, this book represents an important contribution to the debate about the culture of 'classical music', its origins, priorities and survival. The angles from which each chapter proceeds differ from those of a traditional music guide, by examining the Passions in the light of the mindsets of modernity and their interplay with earlier models of thought and belief. While the historical details of Bach's composition, performance and theological context remain crucial, the foremost concern of this study is to relate these works to a historical context that may, in some threads at least, still be relevant today. The central claim of the book is that the interplay of traditional imperatives and those of early modernity renders Bach's Passions particularly fascinating as artefacts that both reflect and constitute some of the priorities and conditions of the Western world.

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Preface

There are many things that a book about Bach's Passions could attempt. Most obvious, perhaps, might be the sort of study that outlines the historical context of Passion settings and the role of Passions in Bach's career, followed by an exhaustive study of the Passions that Bach wrote and performed, their chronology and the details of each version and its performing forces. Readers requiring a book of this kind should, without hesitation, leave this one aside and acquire Daniel R. Melamed's *Hearing Bach's Passions* (Oxford University Press, 2005). Melamed also addresses larger questions about the identity of musical works in the light of the variability of their original texts and performing circumstances. Other readers might seek an interpretation of these works in terms of their theological implications and Bach's Lutheran context. Here, the list of possible books and articles is extremely extensive, but obvious places to start might be Eric T. Chafe's *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991) and Jaroslav Pelikan's *Bach Among the Theologians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

This book is hardly traditional Bach scholarship, although I would hope it will still be of interest to Bach specialists. Most important, I hope it will be a contribution to the debate about the culture of 'classical music', its history and possible future. I certainly set out to provide a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the two Passions together, although the angles from which each chapter proceeds are not necessarily those of a typical music guide. My overall priority is to attempt to examine these complementary works in the light of the broader culture that has tended to accord value to Western art music. Therefore, I propose to raise the stakes surrounding the question of why it is worth performing, listening to, or studying Bach's music at all. I do not by any means ignore the details of Bach's composition and performance of the Passions, nor the theological issues, but my foremost aim is to relate these to a historical context that may, in some threads at least, link Bach's way of life to ours. This does not mean that I am searching for stable, universal qualities that somehow transcend all contexts and peoples, but I assume, rather, that the types of experience this music might seem to suggest or set in motion (in performance, or, in rarer circumstances, in

reading or study) could relate to both our constitution and our understanding of the Western world.

The broader culture (attitude, way of thinking) to which I relate Bach's Passions I describe as 'modernity', a concept I attempt to elucidate in the Introduction. It is within the mindset of modernity, I claim, that these works have their considerable value, in the way they both reflect and constitute some of its priorities and conditions. While the same might be said of much art music of the Western tradition, what I believe to be particularly important is the fact that these works also relate to many processes that are pre-modern, non-modern or even anti-modern. They suggest the mutual inflection of modern and non-modern elements in a sort of dialogue that seems to be in action even before we start listening. It is perhaps this flexibility and quality of constant movement that renders the Passions significant for various stages of modernity (and also in those non-Western environments to which modernity has come later). The corollary is, presumably, that they are less likely to have such significance in cultures that modernity has hardly touched, or those in which modernity has somehow been surpassed or superseded (I can only touch on debates about 'postmodernity' in this study).

Throughout this study I use the direct translation of Bach's Lutheran-style titles of the two Passions, 'Matthew Passion' (*Matthäuspasion*) and 'John Passion' (*Johannespassion*), rather than the way they have tended to be translated into English, 'St Matthew Passion' and 'St John Passion' (the briefer usage is now fairly common in theological Bach scholarship in English). This perhaps can also suggest a more personal, human, interpretation of the persons of the respective evangelists, which is not without relevance for the approach of the present study. It also serves the more practical purpose of making quick comparisons between various movements across the two Passions more manageable. Indeed, if the alternation between the two becomes relatively rapid, I abbreviate the titles to 'MP' and 'JP'.

The numbers I give for the movements in each Passion (and consequently the bar numbers employed, except in [Example 5.1](#), which presents an entire movement) are drawn directly from the editions of the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* (NBA, published by Bärenreiter), edited by Alfred Dürr (*Matthäuspasion*, BWV 244, NBA II/5, 1972) and Arthur Mendel (*Johannespassion*, BWV 245, NBA II/4, 1974). These editions are the most authoritative for the two Passions (various justifiable gripes about the conflation of versions in the John Passion notwithstanding) and are readily available in miniature and vocal scores. For ease of reference, I give the numbering of each movement according to the NBA, together with the opening line of the respective

German text, in the Appendix. Wherever possible, I try to make my argument as convincing as possible for those who are not fluent in music notation, but there are obviously several places (especially in [Chapter 5](#), which contains the greatest amount of musical analysis) where reading the score will be advantageous.

I give my own, relatively informal, translations of most German phrases in the main part of my text. The most informative literal translation of both libretti is provided in Michael Marissen's *Bach's Oratorios – The Parallel German–English Texts with Annotations* (Oxford University Press, 2008). The Gospels of Matthew and John (in Luther's German translation) provide the texts that Bach used for all narrative recitatives and for the choruses representing groups of people in the Passion story (the so-called 'turba', or crowd). However, an enormous proportion of the text in both Passions is essentially contemporary with Bach, by an unknown librettist in the case of the John Passion (drawing on some recent Passion poetry, particularly by Barthold Heinrich Brockes), and by a well-known Leipzig poet, Christian Friedrich Henrici (known as 'Picander'), in the Matthew Passion (for convenience, I will use 'Picander' in the remainder of the text). Picander's text, too, was partly derived from earlier sources (namely, Heinrich Müller). These respective texts would have been handed out to Bach's congregation as 'the libretto' and would therefore relate to the music for ariosos (inconveniently labelled 'recitativo' in the Matthew Passion, but distinct from the recitatives setting biblical text), all the arias and meditative choruses. The congregation's libretto did not include the biblical text or the chorales (both of which were presumably familiar), if Picander's publication of the Matthew libretto within his collected works is anything to go by.

It is impossible to thank all individuals and institutions that have enabled me to complete this study. I am particularly grateful to the Leverhulme Foundation for awarding me a two-year Major Research Fellowship, specifically to undertake this project. But it would have been impossible without the constant support of colleagues and the infrastructure of the University of Glasgow, which also gave me a few extra months of leave in exchange for my four years' service as head of its music department. I am also grateful to the Dunedin Consort, its trustees, donors, and most of all its musicians, for giving me the opportunity to perform both Passions on several occasions during the course of writing this book; also to Linn Records, who produced our recording of the Matthew Passion, which helped inform some of my approach (particularly in [Chapter 4](#)). Lest this period of over two years should seem too luxurious a time for preparing a book of this kind, I should also add that no thanks at all are due to the Higher Education Funding Council for

England (HEFCE, together with its Scottish counterpart, SHEFC), for whom I have been working on the music panel of the UK's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). Work for this took up much of 2008 in particular, and although it was both a privilege and highly stimulating to read (and listen to) over 400 'outputs' from researchers across the UK, the overall experience of quantifying quality in British academia is dispiriting.

Numerous people have been extremely generous in reading or discussing aspects of this work. I have probably forgotten some of the most crucial, but I shall try to list as many as I can: Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, Georgina Born, Jeanice Brooks, Laurence Dreyfus, Simon Frith, John Eliot Gardiner, Harai Golomb, Uri Golomb, Daniel R. Melamed and Reinhard Strohm. Particular thanks should go to the anonymous reviewers of the initial proposal, Roger Parker and David Yearsley, and also to those who gave me comments on the entire manuscript: Karol Berger, Robin Downie, Ruth HaCohen, Thomas Munck, Peter Smaill, Bettina Varwig, and, again, David Yearsley.

I habitually – and very gratefully – dedicate my rambling monographs to my rambling family, the new arrival since my last such dedication being our fifth, and definitely last, child, Fergus. Unfortunately, the first months of this project also coincided with a departure, that of my father, Wilfrid Butt, who had introduced me to both Bach Passions before I reached double figures (it was also he who urged me to think more about Shakespeare in relation to this project, not long before he died). He would have been both pleased and puzzled by the final shape of the book, and he perhaps makes a cameo appearance in the Introduction as that (perhaps increasingly rare) type of figure within modernity who could somehow both be a scientist and retain some religious convictions, with neither direct conflict nor seamless connection. Finally, nothing of this would have been possible without the continual support and endlessly emerging talents of my wife, Sally.

Abbreviations

<i>BJb</i>	<i>Bach-Jahrbuch</i>
<i>Dok</i>	<i>Bach-Dokumente</i> , edited by W. Neumann and H.-J. Schulze, vols. 1–3 (Leipzig and Kassel, 1963, 1969, 1972)
<i>JP</i>	John Passion (<i>Johannespassion</i> , BWV 245, <i>NBA</i> II/4, 1974)
<i>MP</i>	Matthew Passion (<i>Matthäuspasion</i> , BWV 244, <i>NBA</i> II/5, 1972)
<i>NBA</i>	<i>Neue Bach-Ausgabe</i> , edited by the Johann-Sebastian-Bach-Institut, Göttingen, and Bach-Archiv, Leipzig (Kassel and Basle, 1954–)
<i>NBR</i>	<i>The New Bach Reader – A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents</i> , edited by Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, revised and enlarged by Christoph Wolff (New York and London, 1998)

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Introduction

Is there really any need for another study of Bach's Passions, particularly when these (and the Matthew Passion in particular) have inspired nearly two centuries of critical literature? When I first began to consider this project, the one approach that did not seem sufficiently explored was the detailed and comparative analysis of both Passions together. However, the customary methods of approaching Bach's choral works – surveying the compositional history, verbal texts, musical forms, styles and genres – soon seemed inadequate in light of the sheer emotional and narrative scale of the Passions. Perhaps this is partly because they relate to a story that is seminal to Western history. But this could hardly be the entire reason, given that the Gospel narratives have been set so many times to music. Bach's music interacts with the various levels of text in a way that seems to go beyond merely a successful presentation of the story and its attendant affects.

A complex of questions soon began to dominate my thought on the Passions: both of them originated in the relatively local purpose of furnishing the Leipzig liturgical year (they were heard in Leipzig only intermittently between 1724 and 1750), and the vast majority of recent research has centred on details of their composition and performance, together with issues of their original theological purpose and meaning. Yet both Passions have found a deep resonance in a wide range of historical and cultural contexts, most utterly foreign to Bach's Leipzig.¹ To many, this would be because they are of universal value, transcending their original,

¹ In this study I do not consider other Passions, such as the Luke Passion, that have at some point been attributed to Bach; nor those that undoubtedly existed but are largely lost, such as the Mark Passion, or an earlier Weimar Passion oratorio whose traces may survive in the two extant Passions. An examination of the way inauthentic works have been received as Bach's would be an extremely interesting study in itself, and some issues of this kind are already covered in Daniel R. Melamed's *Hearing Bach's Passions* (Oxford University Press, 2005); on the evidence for an earlier Weimar Passion oratorio, see Andreas Glöckner, 'Neue Spuren zu Bachs "Weimarer" Passion', *Bericht über die Wissenschaftliche Konferenz anlässlich des 69. Bach-Festes der Neuen Bachgesellschaft, Leipzig, 29. und 30. März 1994 – Passionsmusiken im Umfeld Johann Sebastian Bachs/Bach unter den Diktaturen 1933–1945 und 1945–1989*, ed. Hans-Joachim Schulze, Ulrich Leisinger and Peter Wollny (Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Olms, 1995), pp. 33–46.

local, purposes. But how then could one draw these works into a focus that reconciles their supposed universality with the local particulars of Bach's Leipzig, which remain the focus of so much scholarship? On the other hand, if the universalist thesis is simply mistaken, what remains as the motivation for the intensive scholarly interest in the historical details, something that is hardly evident in relation to the numerous Passion settings by Bach's contemporaries?

To begin with, simply decreeing that works such as Bach's Passions are 'universal' does not necessarily do them justice, even for their most fervent supporters. For the more universal a human artefact is purported to be, the closer it begins to seem to a phenomenon of natural science and thus something to be interpreted at one remove from human concerns. Seeing the Passions more as 'particulars' surely gives us more of a chance of learning how they might resonate with certain aspects of the human condition, shaded as these will inevitably be by a range of cultural and historical variables. Nevertheless, the habit of proclaiming works of this kind to be of universal significance might in itself be telling, as evidence of a particular culture, albeit one of very long duration and broad geographical application. The overall aim of this project – perhaps one that is impossibly ambitious – is to try and understand Bach's Passions in relation to the wider 'particular' field in which they have been attributed some degree of universal significance. This field is, I suggest, *modernity*, a broad mental and cultural attitude that – in some threads at least – links Bach's musical world to the present. My study is 'traditionally' historicist in assuming that Bach's music is best understood within its cultural context, but I am obviously interpreting the notion of 'cultural context' far more broadly and ambitiously than would normally seem sensible for music in the Western tradition. Although I am by no means ignoring the circumstances and presuppositions surrounding the composition, performance and reception of Bach's Passions in Leipzig, I suggest that the context that really matters relates to the mindset that would see these works as significant well beyond their original purposes. But even this wider context does not necessarily bring values that are relevant 'under any skies', even if it may well appear so at first sight.

Many would see the modern world as itself universal, because it has acquired a sort of timelessness through its obvious achievements in the progressive refinement and continuous expansion of knowledge. One fundamental tendency of modernity – to be sceptical towards past authority and to think of itself as always improving on the past – might well have led us to forget where its roots lay, how it is the product of various

historical processes. Yet current threats to a development that has spread well beyond its origins in the Western world might encourage us to think again. Modernity – whether ‘universal’ or not – faces serious challenges from a number of angles: from cultures reacting against it with a pre-modern zeal (ones that could, ironically, only have been engendered within the context of encroaching modernity); or from the obvious decline in the natural environment that is caused by the excesses of the modern world. Moreover, there is also the question of modernity’s own completion and success, evident in the fall of the Eastern bloc, the untrammelled flow of capital, and the ubiquity of the free market (the almost total breakdown of this system just as I finish this book does not necessarily mean that a new one is about to emerge). The dominance of free capitalism may – in some circumstances at least – have facilitated a transformation into what is sometimes termed a ‘postmodern’ condition, which shares much with its predecessor, but which distances itself from the values and dynamics of modernity proper in several major respects. After all, if certain traits of modernity become ubiquitous (such as a system whose values can only be measured in terms of market forces), perhaps its sense of restless enquiry and quest for transforming what is at hand begin to dissipate. Perhaps elements from the past and from diverse cultures are now so effortlessly accommodated within the system that they no longer provide any challenge to our assumptions; they are merely a selection of the many components of a self-regulating mass culture, their value entirely defined by their current price.² In such a context, Bach’s Passions would no longer seem to possess any universal significance; they would merely represent a particular ‘lifestyle choice’, their validity defined entirely by their level of popularity. Such a situation is surely more than a mere possibility today. In all, then, I do not see any advantage in valuing any music on account of its ‘universality’, since even if a cultural product were somehow proved to be universal, this quality would by no means

² This is what Fredric Jameson calls the ‘cultural logic of late capitalism’; see Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1991). As Charles Whitney suggests in his study of Francis Bacon and the beginnings of modernity, the very suggestion of a postmodern condition brings with it the possibility that modernity as an epoch may be passing away; see his *Francis Bacon and Modernity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 9. However, as Jameson later notes, many who approve of the ‘completion’ of modernity and glory in the dominance of mass culture, the information revolution and the globalized, free-market economy, do not use the term ‘postmodernity’ but merely distinguish their own modernity (one of many alternatives, in a world of unconstricted consumer choice) from the ‘detestable older kind’; Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity – Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 12.

guarantee its survival without some effort on our part. Indeed, it is fatally easy to forget the need to keep any of our 'universals' alive through continual attention to their implications and the cultivation of an ever-developing practice.

What is modernity?

The concept of modernity, which I am trying both to define and co-opt in analysing Bach's Passions, might seem unorthodox within the context of music history. Musicology has generally avoided the term as a broad historical category and tends to associate the 'modern' with the specific stylistic category of 'modernism', as applied to progressive music from the late nineteenth century to the last decades of the twentieth. The rest of music history often falls into the long-trusted art-historical categories of medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical and Romantic, or, in more recent studies, simply into centuries.³ Modernism is a highly important category of art, one that often seems to intensify aspects of the broader modernity (e.g. formalism, autonomy, a radical 'newness') but which can also take modernity's sceptical attitude towards the past to new extremes of negation. It may well be that musicologists have avoided engagement with 'modernity' and all the broader cultural issues that this implies precisely because of the autonomy that Western music has acquired through that very modernity – namely, a sense that music stands apart from all other considerations, that it is somehow more 'true' than the messy contingencies of politics, society and, specifically, cultural history.⁴

Historians, on the other hand, have long used the broad categorization by which the Ancient World is separated from the Modern World by the Middle Ages.⁵ Modernity, in the broad and rather unspecific sense of a 'Modern Age' (which comes closer to the German concept of *Die Neuzeit* than *Die Moderne*, which is a later subset of the former), has its beginnings in the era of the Renaissance and Reformation and is fed by the scientific

³ See Tim Carter and John Butt (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), Preface, pp. xv–xviii.

⁴ See Karol Berger and Anthony Newcomb (eds.), *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), Preface, p. ix.

⁵ Jürgen Habermas traces this conception back to Hegel's designation of the 'new age' ('Neuzeit') coinciding with the Renaissance, Reformation and discovery of the New World, all straddling the years around 1500; Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity – Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 1987), pp. 5–6.

revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁶ Culturally, it surely has some real presence in Montaigne, Shakespeare and Cervantes, and in the philosophy of Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza and Locke. It reaches both a peak and a crisis at the time of the Enlightenment and French Revolution and thereafter forges ahead with the Industrial Revolution and the increasing dominance of capitalism.⁷ It is therefore tempting to divide it into three historical phases, the first dating from the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth; the second, from the time of the French Revolution to the late nineteenth century; and the final phase characterized by modernism (these latter two coincide with the German *Moderne*).⁸ The second phase coincides with the type of music that is traditionally termed 'Classical' and 'Romantic'.⁹

However, it is impossible to give the concept of modernity hard and fast chronological markers. After all, is there really such a pronounced change at the time of the Renaissance and Reformation, and does this period really have more in common with, say, the nineteenth century (presumably within the same 'era') than it does with the world an equivalent amount of time before it (back in the 'Middle Ages')? Furthermore, different national traditions might prioritize different starting points: the Reformation, for instance,¹⁰ or Descartes's concept of the self-conscious, reflexive ego, or the political revolutions of the late eighteenth century. The precise bounds of modernity are clearly dependent on the sort of narrative one adopts to explain it, as if it contains the seeds of a story that

⁶ The notion that modernity began in the late fifteenth century has been a mainstream historical view in English-language history since at least the publication of Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*, vol. 8, *Heroic Ages* (Oxford University Press, 1954); see pp. 106–25, esp. pp. 115–16.

⁷ For Karl Marx, modernity was simply capitalism itself; see Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 80.

⁸ The model Michel Foucault consistently followed in his writings makes a further distinction between the Renaissance and the 'Classical age' (from c. 1650 to 1800), which is then followed by modernity proper. For a good survey of the ways in which modernity has been divided into periods or phases, see Barry Smart, 'Modernity, Postmodernity and the Present', in Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity* (London: Sage, 1990), pp. 14–30.

⁹ This is the music related to 'our modernity' by Karol Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow – An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 5, 14.

¹⁰ The Reformation became a strong feature of German conceptions of modernity, under the influence of Hegel's philosophy of history, particularly in the way the latter is grounded on the transfer of spiritual authority from the church to the individual. This conception was soon taken further in German thought on art by the work of Jacob Burckhardt. See also Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 31.

can be unfolded in several ways.¹¹ We should therefore beware of false continuities and also of the sense that each era must have a 'face' to which everything must conform.¹²

Modernity is perhaps better defined as a bundle of attitudes or mindsets that are only secondarily associated with specific eras and places. We might be able to recognize that elements of it might well appear in periods long before any putative 'Modern' age.¹³ While the Renaissance, with its restoration of a lost antiquity, might not be considered 'modern' in itself, its new oppositional mechanism – beating the immediate past with the stick of the ancient world – could well have been significant, since this was something that was soon to be engaged against the very antiquity it previously envied. Moreover, pre-modern, anti-modern or simply non-modern attitudes might enjoy healthy traditions within any age or society categorized as 'modern'. I would suggest that modernity is most productive when it interacts with traditions that persist in the societies it affects or which it, in turn, discovers in other cultures. If there is any consistency in the mental conditions defining modernity, these could nonetheless produce entirely different results in different circumstances. While I suggest that chronological boundaries are only secondary in defining modernity, one of the foremost 'mental conditions' of modernity is the notion of progress and the development of human knowledge and society in earthly, chronological, time. Thus it is impossible to disassociate these conditions entirely from the periods in which they developed, since such conditions would have brought a renewed self-consciousness of time and historical change.

Well-worn theories associate the mindset of modernity with various developments in the way the cosmos is believed to cohere: foremost is perhaps the concept of 'disenchantment' (Max Weber's famous formulation), a retreat from the magical significance of the world and human

¹¹ Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, pp. 31–3. For Jameson, modernity is a narrative category rather than a concept as such: see p. 40.

¹² See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 251, and Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (London: Routledge, 1972), p. 9.

¹³ A classic example of this approach to modernity (or rather that which is termed 'Enlightenment') is Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (*Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 1944), translated by John Cumming (London and New York: Verso, 1997). The idea of modernity as an attitude was also something emerging in the late work of Foucault, something he characterized as an ironic heroization of the present. This means that the high valuation of the present in modernity is intimately tied to a desperate desire to imagine it other than it is. See Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves, 'Critique and Enlightenment: Michel Foucault on "Was ist Aufklärung"', in Norman Geras and Robert Wokler (eds.), *The Enlightenment and Modernity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 184–203, esp. p. 196.

practices, the ‘extirpation of animism’.¹⁴ With this came the view that the cosmos was not necessarily constructed entirely for mankind’s benefit, something that brought a reaction against customary beliefs, particularly against the Augustinian view (reinforced by Luther) that evil exists in the world entirely as a reflex of the original sin of mankind. Now a new form of human initiative would be required to render the natural world amenable to the purposes of the ‘disembedded’ human. For Hans Blumenberg, ‘Die Neuzeit’ began when Western man had to take up the ‘burden of self-assertion’. With the new development of scientific method, it became necessary to adapt man to the impersonal reality uncovered by repeatable experimentation. The distinction between reality and the human condition also brought with it the contrary tendency: to adapt reality to the needs and purposes of man.¹⁵

If the pre-modern attitude would see human experience as subordinate to and dependent on a greater reality beyond the world, the modern will tend to associate the real with what is directly experienced and explicitly created within the world; any reality beyond what can be inferred through the emerging methodologies of science is simply unknowable. Moreover, any knowledge whatever remains provisional, to be improved and expanded *ad infinitum*. Progress has no absolute ends or limits in sight. Something of the excitement at the opening of new horizons is captured in the print of the Pillars of Hercules on the title page of Francis Bacon’s *Instauratio Magna* of 1620, as Blumenberg notes.¹⁶ One gets the sense of the possibility of breaking out of an enchanted circle of interconnected elements – the ‘ready-made’ quality of the pre-modern world¹⁷ – and that, having chosen a direction in which to sail, the journey could be potentially endless.

Religious beliefs are not necessarily to be excluded within the modern mindset, rather they are no longer seamlessly connected with whatever happens in the empirical realm, and can inhere in a different sphere, even within personal experience. The fate of religion is symptomatic of a more general separation of the various forms of order, belief and specialization

¹⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 5.

¹⁵ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (*Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 2nd rev. edn 1976), trans. by Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT, 1983), pp. 137–8, 209. I borrow the term ‘disembedding’ from Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 49–67, where it is related particularly to the way the individual becomes distinct from received notions of community and society.

¹⁶ Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 340.

¹⁷ See Andrew Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 48.

within modernity. Hence, in modernity, one could be active as a rational scientist while attuned to the feelings and traditional practice of religion, without necessarily feeling the need to reconcile the two; religion simply becomes a private matter, with its own rules and practices, which do not necessarily connect or interact with all other aspects of life. In Bach's time, the notion of religion and reason representing two separate spheres of knowledge and truth was already evident in Pascal's unfinished writings, and such a separation was recommended by Johannes Bredenburg as a way of protecting revealed religion from the threat of radical atheism that was inferred from Spinoza's writings. The most robust attempts at reconciliation were made by Gottfried Leibniz: to him (and perhaps Bach, too), all the contradictory elements would somehow cohere once they were viewed from God's point of view. Bach's Leipzig compatriot Johann Christoph Gottsched (who clearly embraced a much more fashionable aesthetic position than Bach) took a moderate stance that still left open the possibility of magic and the work of the Devil, but did not lay any particular stress on this.¹⁸

The coexistence of practices that are in their strongest sense contradictory – even within a single human subject – invariably gives each a new, specifically autonomous, quality. The ongoing, unlimited development of each could engender a new sense of openness in terms of both external reality and the human mind.¹⁹ Pragmatically, the separation of activities could also be exercised in the name of efficiency, something most obviously demonstrated in the division of labour necessary for industrialized production. In such ways, modernity typically drives a wedge between the natural world and human civilization, by which humankind is progressively alienated from the secure and harmonious place in the natural order that our cultural memories always seem to evoke. Hans Robert Jauss usefully relates this line of thinking to a trajectory leading from Rousseau to Adorno, suggesting an intellectual epoch characterized by a profound ambivalence towards modernity (a dialectic that is born of nothing but modernity itself), stretching from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.²⁰ By this token, 'full' modernity would belong to the era beginning just after Bach. My approach is to suggest, rather,

¹⁸ See Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment – Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford University Press, 2001), esp. pp. 355, 372, 514.

¹⁹ Eric Voegelin, *Collected Works*, vol. 23, *Religion and the Rise of Modernity*, vol. 5 of the *History of Political Ideas*, ed., with an introduction, by James L. Wiser (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1998), pp. 136–7.

²⁰ Hans Robert Jauss, 'Der literarische Prozess des Modernismus von Rousseau bis Adorno', in Reinhart Herzog and Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewußtsein* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1987), pp. 243–68, trans. by Lisa C. Roetzel as 'The Literary Process of Modernism from Rousseau to Adorno', *Cultural Critique* 11 (1988–9), 27–61.

that such chronological distinctions are not so absolute, and that Bach, and much of the environment to which he belongs, are of specific interest because of the way modern and pre-modern elements interact within them.

The critique that modernity continually turns upon itself partly derives from its ongoing suspicion of unquestioned reliance on past authority. If this represents an antipathy towards tradition in general it is also clear that modernity has spawned many of its own traditions (not least that of being suspicious towards the past).²¹ This was certainly the case with the Reformation, which overthrew recent tradition in the process of attempting to restore what it saw as the worldview of early Christianity. Luther's turn against the established church and towards the self-assertion of the individual through personal faith was articulated in the service of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin and the sense that all that is wrong with the world stems from this.²² Very few of the components of the Reformation (as a 'proto-modernity') were actually new – there had been many forms of anti-ecclesiastical spirituality before – but the fact that they rose to institutional level in their own right did indeed produce a new situation, one that established a pluralism that could become the bedrock for a diversity of beliefs and various degrees of scepticism.²³

Roughly simultaneous with the type of self-assertion that was emerging with the Reformation was the breakdown of the medieval chivalric tradition and the complex customs and interactions of various classes, dominated by aristocratic and military etiquette. Cervantes' satire on the old order, *Don Quixote*, clearly demonstrates how this had irrevocably

²¹ The suspicion of past authority is obvious throughout the work of Descartes and it is also strongly evident in the work of Thomas Hobbes; see his *Leviathan, or, Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil* (1651), ed. by Nelle Fuller (Chicago, Auckland, London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2nd edn, 1990), especially Chapters 21 and 46. See also Robert P. Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 28–31, and John J. Joughin, 'Shakespeare, Modernity and the Aesthetic: Art, Truth and Judgement in *The Winter's Tale*', in Hugh Grady (ed.), *Shakespeare and Modernity – Early Modern to Millennium* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 61–84, esp. p. 78. Eduardo Mendieta, paraphrasing Habermas, aptly suggests that 'the tradition of modernity is the critique of tradition for the sake of tradition'; see Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality – Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, edited, with an introduction, by Eduardo Mendieta (Oxford: Polity, 2002), pp. 16–17.

²² The notion of humans as being guilty by virtue of their very existence is still very strongly evident in much of the text of the Matthew Passion, particularly in chorales stressing man's guilt, e.g. 'Ich bins, ich sollte büßen' (10); 'Was ist die Ursach aller solcher Plagen?' (19); 'O Mensch, bewein' (29).

²³ Voegelin, *Religion and the Rise of Modernity*, pp. 134–6.

declined by the early seventeenth century.²⁴ What is less obvious is what the disintegration in this order actually led to, although it clearly left a space for new ways of defining the self. Some commentators point to the steady breakdown of the assumption of resemblance and interconnectedness between all facets and dimensions of the world and universe (a central target of Cervantes' satire). This has been most famously theorized by Foucault in recent times, but was already clearly central to Descartes's critique of inherited modes of thought: 'Whenever people notice some similarity between two things, they are in the habit of ascribing to the one what they find true of the other, even when the two are not in that respect similar.'²⁵ The issue of resemblance – and the interconnectedness of all elements of the world – is particularly important in relation to a study of the Bach Passions, since many analyses will claim specific connections between aspects of the music and theological concepts. If it is plausible that Bach intended or intuited such connections, this would imply a pronounced pre-modern attitude in his mindset. More significantly, the fact that many scholars so enthusiastically embrace such connections shows the extent to which pre-modern thinking is still an essential component of our contemporary world. Indeed, the concept of resemblance has undergone many forms of revival within even the strongest eras of modernity, most significantly in various forms of musical Romanticism.

If, in one sense, modernity led to the sense of independent development in an infinite number of directions, there was also the contrary tendency to imagine that all such diversity could be comprehended as a whole by being brought under a single, quasi-mathematical system. As Descartes suggested, if things can be represented by a system that no longer betrays any direct resemblance to that which it represents, then such a system could translate everything into a neutralized, objective form of representation.²⁶ Modernity is thus frequently related to the development of

²⁴ For an analysis of *Don Quixote* and its relation to modernity, see Anthony J. Cascardi, *The Subject of Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 72–124.

²⁵ René Descartes, *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii* (c. 1628), Rule 1, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 9. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things – An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (unattributed translation of *Les Mots et les choses*, 1966), (New York: Vintage, 1994). See also Dalia Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes: the Origins of Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 41. Judovitz is sceptical of reductionism on the part of both Foucault and Descartes, observing that writers from Plato to Montaigne were well aware of the way resemblance could produce illusion, and suggesting that Foucault merely relied on Descartes's approach, which itself lacked a systematic critique of resemblance.

²⁶ Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation*, p. 48.

instrumentalized rationality, the ability to adapt rational principles from one situation and apply them in another, in order to progress the material comforts of humankind (Max Weber's description of equal temperament as an essential element of rationalization is, of course, of particular interest for anyone interested in the role of Bach in the unfolding of modernity).²⁷

If the world is to be mapped and increasingly controlled through a system that treats all things equally and dispassionately, any resulting representation can only be useful and practical if it takes account of how the object will appear from different viewpoints. The sense of accurate portrayal relative to a specific viewpoint is obvious – to the point of truism – in the development of perspective in painting. But this shows precisely how 'representation' becomes a particular issue within modernity, since it involves the sense that there is no longer any direct means of duplicating or mirroring reality; any attempt at depicting or imitating it is fundamentally a human construction that partly shapes and colours that which it represents. This clearly makes it important to understand the human subject position in more detail. Indeed, the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century shows the development of a specifically modern form of human subject, one characterized by its sense of individuality and autonomy, and which in some forms appropriated the pre-existing concept of the single, divine standpoint.²⁸

To summarize: there are clearly many ways of defining modernity, and the concept is only going to provide illumination if I draw together those aspects that resonate with the concerns of this study. Foremost is the notion of the human born into a world that provides it with no specific place in a broader, enchanted, cosmic order (regardless of one's beliefs in what such an order might be); nor should the social order into which one is born provide any necessary constraints on what one can do or think. The natural world is accessible through reason, but the range of potential knowledge is infinite. Both social structures and the development of the individual contain elements that are necessarily artificial, tailored to effect a sense of change or progress in real time. Each area of knowledge and experience can be developed along its own trajectory, engendering a new sense of autonomy. Such a sense can begin to colour both the character of

²⁷ Max Weber, *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music* (*Die rationalen und sozialen Grundlagen der Musik*, appendix to *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, written 1911, published Tübingen, 1921), trans. and ed. Don Martindale, Johannes Riedel and Gertrude Neuwirth (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958). For an excellent, if idiosyncratic, study of the origins of musical modernity, see Daniel K.L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. pp. 8–28.

²⁸ See Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, p. 148.

the individual (in the direction of increasing independence from inherited traditions, but also in the opposite sense of being a powerless component within divided labour) and the human artefact. Pieces of music might start to acquire an aura that somehow transcends their original purposes or the intentions of the composer; such an aura might be a factor both of the composer's attitude to the music and of the way it is heard and received. All these factors are in constant circulation, so there is no sense of any having an identity that is absolutely fixed.

I have already suggested that modernity is not primarily a historical category, even if any description of it can hardly avoid falling into a narrative; a historical trajectory seems to follow to the degree that a modern mindset is in place. Although my emphasis so far has been on modernity as a mindset, this is obviously impossible to pin down in terms of individual historical persons; it is unlikely that anyone has consistently and exclusively identified themselves with the array of features I have highlighted (disembedded humanity, a sense of potentially infinite knowledge, etc.). Most people surely also carry in their minds many 'non-modern' thoughts, feelings and opinions. Modernity describes an exceptional attitude, a supplement to a broad range of non-modern human conditions. It is primarily a theory, something that is plausible to the degree that it serves to illuminate a number of human tendencies; it is also inevitably and continually refined by the material with which it interacts.

Modernity and music

Musically, we could look for some of the historical origins of modernity in the sixteenth century. Certain genres of polyphonic church music developed musical processes by which music seemed to acquire a degree of autonomous development, and composers became increasingly concerned with the ways in which music could relate to text. Most obvious – at least in retrospect – might be the deliberations of the Florentine Camerata, the birth of opera, and Monteverdi's conscious effort to codify a new style that supplements the old, the *seconda prattica*. Music became directed towards presenting narratives and emotions, developed in real time; its newfound humanity rendered it the servant of text rather than the analogue of extra-worldly proportion. Examples of this kind of music were to be heard in church too. Yet its direct connection with texts and their attendant emotions was perhaps not as secure as the reformers might initially have imagined. For, as new formalizing procedures emerged from

the interplay of traditional techniques of musical construction, rhetorical presentation, dance patterns and newly expressive gestures, music seemed capable of pursuing a life of its own. It could certainly continue to parallel human emotion and the implications of text, but seemed to acquire the potential to go beyond these. As Walter Benjamin has suggested in relation to German tragic drama, perhaps in the seventeenth century a deep-rooted intuition of the problematic nature of art was emerging as a reaction to its self-confidence during the Renaissance.²⁹ Karol Berger perceptively notes how Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* actually seems to end with the reaffirmation of the *prima prattica*; Orfeo achieves bliss not through the music that aims to express the passions of the speaking subject, but rather through the sonorous harmony of the spheres, his beloved's resemblance to be seen in the sun and stars.³⁰ But perhaps there is more than this sense of restoring the 'modern' Renaissance cosmology of music (where music resonates with a reality that is only partially seen) – since so much about the opera seems to suggest the triumph of music as a system in its own right. For instance, the instrumental display can be heard as an end in itself and the recurring ritornelli that seem initially to encapsulate a particular emotion or situation later reappear in different contexts. However much humanist reformers at the end of the sixteenth century (together with many later critics) might have prized music for its supposedly 'natural' qualities, what were becoming increasingly effective were precisely its independent aspects, its deviations and its modification of supposed natural principles (whether of the broader, if hidden, reality – *prima prattica* – or of human passions – *seconda prattica*). With this potential for autonomy came the sense that musical works were individuals, following their own implications and potentials, and almost of a piece with the emergent individuality of those who created them.

Although the fully fledged concept of originality – essential to the type of genius usually associated with the Romantic era – was not yet fully in place, it might be possible to infer that seventeenth-century composers were less wary than their predecessors of the potential accusation of 'secondary creation'. The notion of everything stemming from the single God's creative act had been strongly enforced since the early centuries of

²⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 1963), trans. John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 176. Chua, *Absolute Music*, pp. 23–8, relates this sense of anxiety to the dividing mechanisms of early modernity, by which music and speech were no longer unproblematically connected to the divine truths of the heavens.

³⁰ Berger, *Bach's Cycle*, pp. 25, 40–1.

the Christian era, as a way of protecting against any tendencies towards Gnostic dualism (by which the god of salvation was correcting and improving the work of a less benevolent god of creation).³¹ It was the gradual overcoming of the notion that one should not enquire beyond the bounds of established knowledge, or create outside the bounds of established practice, that might describe the move from a pre-modern to a more modern concept of musical composition. This is not to say that earlier music cannot be startlingly original or clearly impressed with the signature of unusual musical talent or curiosity, nor that later music is always unique and autonomous; my point concerns rather the intentional attitude underlying the creation and reception of the music.

Music's customary prestige as a mirror and analogue of the universe rendered its ancient roots specifically durable and left it a comparative latecomer on the stage of modernity. In this respect, the 'timeline' approach to modernity is entirely appropriate, by which a fundamental change happens – in the musical world at least – in the latter half of the eighteenth century. This is the approach of Andrew Bowie, who describes music's transition towards modernity as the analogue of the growing view of language as no longer directly representative of reality. If language cannot precisely relate to a pre-existent reality, then music's linguistic role (whether as a servant of language or as some original language in its own right) becomes cloudier, and the priority of texted music over untexted is gradually reversed.³² Bach's more abstract collections that research a particular issue of compositional theory might seem to presuppose an even earlier mindset (i.e. that predating the era when music served text), which assumed a continuity between the fabric of the music and the structure of the cosmos, and thus the survival of a form of musical thought that was yet to be disenchanted. Nevertheless, most of the pieces in *The Art of Fugue* or *The Musical Offering* display some signs of 'finish'.³³ This might be a consistency of figuration going beyond the contrapuntal tasks at hand, or a sense of trajectory, tension or culmination – all of which give the pieces a sort of individuality or 'self-consciousness', as a supplement to their didactic purposes. There is a hint that Bach, even at his most archaic, somehow writes music that chimes with the sensibilities of a much later age.

³¹ Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, pp. 128–30.

³² Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity*, pp. 51–4.

³³ For a study of 'modern' aspects of Bach's *The Art of Fugue*, including aspects of affective unity and motivic development, see Bernhard Billeter, 'Modernism in Johann Sebastian Bachs *Kunst der Fuge*', *BjB* 87 (2001), 23–53.

Bach's relationship to musical modernity

The feature that I consider especially important in discerning issues of modernity in music (or at least in the attitude it seems to display) is the notion of artificiality, the idea that progress can be achieved by acknowledging the imperfections of nature and modifying the systems at hand to improve things from a human perspective. This is perhaps the one area where we have specific evidence from the Bach circle of the composer's participation in the aesthetic debates surrounding the constructions of musical modernity. This was the public dispute with Johann Adolph Scheibe, who accused Bach of tempering the natural element of music with too much artifice. Bach's response (articulated through the mouthpiece of Johann Adam Birnbaum) was that art such as his served to perfect those aspects of nature that were unfinished or imperfect (see p. 63). Here, two particular movements in modernity as it was developing in the early eighteenth century – the concept of nature as a ruling system to which mankind needs to conform and that of human artifice as a means of improving nature – clash in the earliest stage of Bach criticism.

Bach doubtless saw his task as a composer as one that involved perfecting and improving whatever musical techniques or idioms he had inherited. From his (largely pre-modern?) viewpoint, this might have meant reconciling actual pieces of music with the perfection of a God-given harmony that already, to all intents and purposes, existed as part of Creation. Perhaps his thinking resembled that of Leibniz, for whom the world and all of creation were freely chosen by God as the best of all possible worlds. Even if this were to contain significant hardship, evil and dissonance, these all conspire – in the larger order of things – to produce the best possible result. But the actual result in Bach's case was a profound change in the materials, through their reworking and interaction – in other words, a sort of development in the way music could be defined, and in the effects it might have on the listener. This clashes somewhat with the traditional Lutheran injunction to focus on the faith of the individual at the expense of a world that is irredeemably flawed and barely worth improving in itself. The model of progress to which Bach was contributing seemed rather to suggest that 'improvement' – at least in the world of his music – could provide a means of developing the individual's faith or virtue. This conforms to Blumenberg's idea that progress within modernity requires a reversal of the causal relation between moral and physical evils: evil and human hardship in the world are no longer consequences of

the Fall and the inherent sinfulness of mankind; instead, improving the material worldly realm makes it easier to become a better person.³⁴ Bach evidently set great store by personal improvement, and his restless search for new musical experience seems almost to be unprecedented. His obituary, largely constructed by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel, may well have rendered this story stronger than it actually was, but it is clear that both father and son together reflect a historical trend towards the virtues of self-improvement and even the notion of individual genius.³⁵

One of my crucial presuppositions is already obvious: that the condition of modernity does not exclude or supersede the pre-modern (or even, simply, the 'non-modern'), but that many such elements are newly inflected, energized or transformed within a modern outlook. Most significantly, the older elements often become spheres of knowledge and practice developed along their own specialist trajectories (hence the flurry of treatises on fugue in the years after Bach's death?).³⁶ Bach's Passions are therefore not specifically of value to the degree that they contain modern elements ('the more up-to-date/ahead of their time, the more impressive'). This would be something reminiscent of the old trope of Bach as a 'progressive' composer, even if – or even because – he appeared archaic to his contemporaries.³⁷ Adopting the notion of 'Bach the progressive' too wholeheartedly could bring with it the uneasy corollary that – in a world governed by progress – nothing is more outmoded than yesterday's progressive. I am trying to move away from defining musical modernity in terms of specific contents – say, identifiable motives, harmonies or gestures – by seeing it more in a certain attitude, even in a certain result, and one to which diverse components might contribute.

I nevertheless retain at least a trace of the progressive model by suggesting that modernity is a historical particular that links some of our concerns to Bach's, albeit in ways that he could not possibly have

³⁴ Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 54.

³⁵ For a study of the way Bach's official obituary was designed to demonstrate his isolated and lifelong quest for musical self-improvement, see Peter Williams's biography, *J.S. Bach – A Life in Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁶ Habermas makes a useful distinction between 'spheres of knowing', 'spheres of belief' and those of legally organized and everyday life; see *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 19. Charles Taylor separates secularization – the end of society structured by dependence on God or the beyond – from the continuation of religion in both public and private life, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, pp. 187–8, 193–4.

³⁷ The clearest formulation of this position is Robert L. Marshall's 'Bach the Progressive: Observations on His Later Works', *Musical Quarterly* 62 (1976), 313–57, revised in Robert L. Marshall, *The Music of Johann Sebastian Bach: the Sources, the Style, the Significance* (New York: Schirmer, 1989), pp. 23–58.

anticipated. This involves a particular energy that still seems to render such music, simply, *modern* – a sort of immediacy that retains its newness in a variety of presents, and quite apart from how archaic the content might be.³⁸ It may come down to the sense that, although this music is firmly grounded in experience of the past, it is somehow orientated towards the future.³⁹ If Bach is to be credited with some sort of ‘modern’ insight, it is more a question of his intuition of the broader conditions of a specific historical attitude than his invention of musical techniques or ideas that are ‘ahead of their time’. Moreover, there is a blurring of the sense of agency: between what Bach intended to do, what the musical processes he set in motion did and continue to do, and what we read and hear in the music.⁴⁰ I associate this sense of a continually circulating process (i.e. nothing is absolutely fixed, nothing stands still, least of all in this type of music) with the modern: there is no fixed meaning, sense or emotion lying encrypted in the music. But the meanings and senses that the process sets in motion can be of the most intense kind – indeed all the more so because of the circulation involved.

It is impossible to gauge exactly what Bach’s own listeners might have heard in this music. The apparently distracting behaviour of certain parishioners in the Leipzig church services might seem remote from the attentive listening context of later concert practice. But, as Tanya Kevorkian has noted, ‘careful listening was not equated with silence’ in

³⁸ See Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 35, for the comparison of the notion of ‘modernity’ with something analogous to an electrical charge: ‘to isolate this or that Renaissance painter as the sign of some first or nascent modernity is . . . always to awaken a feeling of intensity and energy that is greatly in excess of the attention we generally bring to interesting events or monuments in the past’. A similar charge was suggested by Mikhail Bakhtin in the context of the novel; see M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination – Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 31: ‘the novel has a new and quite specific problemativeness: characteristic for it is an eternal re-thinking and re-evaluation. That center of activity that ponders and justifies the past is transferred to the future. This “modernity” of the novel is indestructible’, and p. 421, ‘Thanks to the intentional potential embedded in them, such works have proved capable of uncovering in each era and against ever new dialogizing backgrounds ever newer aspects of meaning; their semantic content literally continues to grow, to further create out of itself.’

³⁹ Habermas notes how historians such as Reinhart Koselleck often relate modern time consciousness to the sense of a ‘horizon of expectation’ that replaces the experiential space of the pre-modern world; see *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Naomi Cumming makes a very similar point, although couching it in the more formalist language of Peirce’s semiotics, by which the listener is the ‘interpretant’ who completes the musical ‘sign’, in ‘The Subjectivities of “Erbarne Dich”’, *Music Analysis* 16/1 (1997), 5–44, esp. 8–17.

the secular practice of Bach's time, so the same was doubtless true of church.⁴¹ Putting together the Lutheran injunction to cultivate the faith of the individual, on an urgent day-by-day basis, with the affective and narrative techniques developed in opera, Bach may have been instrumental in the development of a new, intensive, form of musical listening, one that may have been only partially realized by the members of his own congregation. If there is any evidence that Bach was indeed 'ahead of his time' in terms of the type of listening he both presupposed and helped to constitute, it lies in the fact that the intensity of the reception of his music in the nineteenth century was of an entirely different magnitude from that of his own time.

A close study of anything in relation to 'the modern' is always in danger of provoking the insinuation that any pre-modern elements are to be devalued; this danger is particularly acute in a society where we are continuously enjoined to 'modernize' (often nowadays a euphemism for assimilating all values towards what some term 'the postmodern' condition of seamless capital).⁴² But many of our specific problems in the contemporary world stem precisely from some of the unintended (and, at their worst, intended) consequences of modernity. This is something surely acknowledged in contemporary reactions against modernity, such as the desire to return to traditional crafts – albeit often funded by the surplus generated by capitalism and industrial production – and to prize cultural difference over global standardization.⁴³ Music that comes from pre-modern contexts may have specific value for us on account of its relating to aspects of life, experience and belief that have survived from before the modern era, that are contrary to the modern, or that have somehow been revived within it. Pre-modern music may even have gained ground in our time as a consequence of the overcoming or completion of modernity – an issue that could equally apply to the exponential growth in non-Western, pre-modern or – most significant of all – popular music. Therefore, the many 'pre-modern' elements we could intuit in Bach's Passions might be equally as valuable as the modern ones, as part of the comforting 're-enchantment' that our circumstances often encourage, while some of the more 'modern' elements could now seem curiously dated.

⁴¹ See Tanya Kevorkian, *Baroque Piety: Religion, Society, and Music in Leipzig, 1650–1750* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 29–52, quote from p. 41.

⁴² Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, pp. 9–10.

⁴³ See John Butt, *Playing with History – the Historical Approach to Musical Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 157–8, 165–217.

One thing that Bach's Passions might seem to achieve in the process of performance is a sort of counterpoint of modern and non-modern, something that stretches well beyond the mere combination of musical lines. To take the most obvious example of this sort of counterpoint, the religious element of Bach's Passions is clearly inherited from pre-modernity (without our falling into the generalization that modernity necessarily excludes or unremittingly threatens religion),⁴⁴ while their elements of autonomous musical form – perhaps parallel with the sort of autonomy being developed by the individual human from the seventeenth century onwards – represent a more specifically modern development.

This crude picture becomes more complicated if we consider that Christianity, in its own split from the traditional association of religion with a particular community, provided some of the seeds of the modern condition and its conception of independent individuals, able to develop themselves in contexts beyond that into which they were born. In Christianity uniquely within the ancient theistic religions, the divine became both a transcendent viewpoint, unified and omnipotent (but invisible to the world as we know it), and also humanly present in the world through the ministry of Jesus.⁴⁵ The Gospel should be proclaimed to all who are competent to receive it, regardless of background, race or birth; existing laws are neither to be blindly followed nor overturned without subjecting them to the scrutiny of personal experience and faith; and progress can be achieved by exploiting the contradictions in the inherited laws. This new situation can therefore give temporal and ethical goals to the individual within the actual span of one's life and irrespective of birth or cultural circumstances. If we consider the fact that the principal source relating to Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection is fourfold (or, bearing in mind the close relationship between the three synoptic

⁴⁴ Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, pp. 148–51, sees Christianity as more than merely a precursor or catalyst for modernity, viewing modernity's ethic of freedom, universal justice, individualist conscience and democracy as representing the direct combination of Judaic justice with the Christian ethic of love. Modern faith, if it endures, changes into something more self-reflexive, one's religious standpoint relativized by secular knowledge and the awareness of other religions. From this viewpoint, fundamentalism cannot belong to the modern condition. Blumenberg, on the other hand, feels that attempts to describe the modern age as a secularization of Christian categories do an injustice to the legitimacy of modernity. He suggests, instead, the notion of 'reoccupation', by which modern categories might indeed fill conceptual spaces that were previously occupied by religion, but the positions thus occupied are themselves prior to the religious occupants. See *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, pp. 27–51, esp. p. 49.

⁴⁵ One surely does not have to be an atheist to see at least some of the seeds of secularism in the development of a specific, subjective position combined with the drawing of the divine towards the world of human actuality.

Gospels, at least twofold), the eminently 'modern' notion of taking account of plural perspectives in viewing a singular phenomenon is already latent in the Christian tradition. It made the notion of relativizing one's own perspective and traditions a fundamental facility of Western culture.⁴⁶

A counterpoint between religious and subjective-autonomous elements in Bach's Passions means that neither automatically predominates, and this sort of balance – or productive tension – is perhaps part of the durable quality of these works. If we are indeed living in an era after the main thrust of modernity, there may be some sort of parallel between our time and Bach's – on opposite sides of an era, as it were. As Harvie Ferguson has suggested, the Baroque age was rich in its anticipations of cultural discoveries in a way that curiously parallels our own; it also established a richly pluralistic attitude that was in some sense 'interrupted' by later forms of modernity that imposed a greater degree of rationalization and uniformity on some aspects of bourgeois life.⁴⁷ While this line of thought is certainly stimulating in relation to a study of Bach's Passions, the notion of a pre-modern/post-modern parallel has become something of a cliché in studies of early modern culture, particularly in literature.⁴⁸ Hugh Grady stresses that it is all very well noting that we have an affinity with the type of subjectivity found in Shakespeare, because his imperfectly formed human subjects – yet to be solidified into the stereotypical 'bourgeois subjects' with fixed identities – have something in common with our more fluid postmodern subjectivity. But there are plenty of writings from within modernity proper that exhibit subversion, transgression and the undermining of authority.⁴⁹ One of the most pernicious pieties of some self-proclaimed postmodernists is the assumption that everything within

⁴⁶ For examinations of the use of the term 'modern' within the early Christian era, see Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, pp. 17–18; Whitney, *Francis Bacon and Modernity*, pp. 8–10. On the West's capacity to decentre the individual's own perspective, as moulded by the Judeo-Christian tradition, see Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, p. 154.

⁴⁷ Harvie Ferguson, *Modernity and Subjectivity – Body, Soul, Spirit* (Charlottesville and London: Virginia University Press, 2000), pp. 194–8.

⁴⁸ This is a particular feature of Stephen Greenblatt's brilliant early study *Renaissance Self-fashioning – From More to Shakespeare* (University of Chicago Press, 1980, new edn 2005), e.g. pp. 174–5, 'We sense too that we are situated at the close of the cultural movement initiated in the Renaissance and that the places in which our social and psychological world seems to be cracking apart are those structural joints visible when it was first constructed. In the midst of the anxieties and contradictions attendant upon the threatened collapse of this phase of our civilization, we respond with passionate curiosity and poignancy to the anxieties and contradictions upon its rise.'

⁴⁹ See introduction to Hugh Grady (ed.), *Shakespeare and Modernity – Early Modern to Millennium* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 12–13.

modernity necessarily points towards an ordered regulation of obedient, individualist subjects, always on the brink of some new Auschwitz. What seems to have been forgotten is the fact that many examples of art – even some of the most supposedly canonical – articulate a resistance and oppositional character that represent the complex tensions of modernity far more vividly than many theoretical generalizations.⁵⁰ Most attempts at repudiating modernity themselves exemplify modernity's own totalizing tendencies and remain entirely 'insensitive to the highly *ambivalent* content of cultural and social modernity', as Habermas has observed.⁵¹

It may seem that I am attempting to find a way of resurrecting the old belief that 'the music itself' in the classical tradition lies somehow apart and beyond any individual valuation and that I am trying to shore up that tradition by giving it some sort of generalized cultural meaning, a useful content. But my thesis is that this music is significant not so much for any specific cultural content or meaning (or some sort of transcendent meaning, divorced from human concerns), but rather in the way its various elements relate within a process created and heard in time. It is this interplay of various elements, not least those that are specifically part of a performance, that makes this music a 'hook', with the potential for resonating with, reconciling, or tempering a broad range of meaning and belief. Music of this kind doesn't necessarily 'contain' any specific ideology or meaning, but its dialogic implications strongly encourage us to attach these from the outside. The definition of the composer, his intentions, the effect of the music and our own sense of being gained through it are all part of a process that is never entirely static.

Does this presupposition that the Passions do not 'contain' anything mean that I am trying to sidestep some of the difficult cultural issues that surround them, such as the frequent perceptions of anti-Semitism in the John Passion?⁵² I certainly do not intend to neutralize these issues as such, although this might be part of the net result. For I maintain that music cannot possibly contain a specific ideology or meaning, at least not in the sense of one poured into it by the composer or his environment, enduring in the notated trace, and then heard again – without fail – in any act of reception. Of course, this is not to say that the John Passion cannot be

⁵⁰ This is undoubtedly one of the ways in which Adorno's outlook, developed partly through an intense and exhaustive consideration of music, continues to have a signal relevance in an age when most of his worst fears about commodification and the domination of the 'administered society' seem to have been realized.

⁵¹ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 338.

⁵² See Michael Marissen's searching study *Lutheranism, Anti-Judaism and Bach's St John Passion – With an Annotated Literal Translation of the Libretto* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

used in a particular way or within a particular environment where it will reinforce specific prejudices on account of its text and the seemingly violent effect of the music. Moreover, to the extent that anti-Semitism has played a part in the Christian tradition, seeded in the Gospels themselves, anything that is created within this tradition will inevitably carry something of this risk. More significantly, a particular brand of anti-Semitism has surely been one of the by-products of modernity itself as this has played out in the West, so again anything that shares in some of the mechanisms of modernity will always carry the risk of serving its darkest sides as well as its most positive aspects.⁵³ From this point of view then, to identify the obvious barbarism lying as part of the origins of works such as Bach's Passions is a sort of truism: that is, something undoubtedly true but which does not therefore explain how such works have the power they do or whether their barbarous traces have (or have ever had) any effect as such.⁵⁴

The significance of the Passion story as one of the most fundamental narratives in the Western tradition renders Bach's settings especially suitable for the approach I am adopting. They connect with broader cultural issues than anything else within Bach's output. Unlike most seminal narratives and mythologies, the Passion story is based on an event with some likely historical basis, and to many it is the central component of a supreme truth, higher than all others. Yet what makes Bach's Passions so striking is not their truth content as such. What could possibly count as 'truth' in music, in any case? Perhaps, following what were almost certainly Bach's own beliefs, we might affirm that the inherited laws of harmony and counterpoint are necessarily 'true' and become more so the more perfectly and ingeniously they are realized. But this stance does not accommodate the formal manipulation of musical ideas, or even necessarily the extent of the tonal system as it evolved over the course of Bach's life. In other words, the impressive element of Bach's Passions, that which makes whatever truth the story contains so much more real, is their artifice, the 'fictional' constructions of the arias and choruses and the pronounced tonal contours of the recitative. Many of the inventive tools at Bach's disposal came directly out of the traditions of Baroque opera, a genre which is fictional in its utmost essence, often exploiting its own

⁵³ See, esp., Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

⁵⁴ See Joughin, 'Shakespeare, Modernity and the Aesthetic', pp. 62–3, where, following Andrew Bowie, he notes that works such as Shakespeare's can sustain interpretations that are diametrically opposed, so that even indisputable relations with barbarism cannot tell us all there is to know about such works or about the way they continue to exert power over us.

self-conscious artificiality in what some consider a prototype for the twentieth century's 'culture industry'.⁵⁵ Bach's Passions thus bring to a head the tensions between truth and fiction, nature and artifice, a confrontation that very much complicates their relation to the norm of religious truth. It is precisely this tension that might render them so productive within debates about modernity.

Much of my attitude in this study is directed toward the possibility that Bach's writing acquired its apparent power precisely through doing musically what the modern novel was doing textually, as a sort of fiction that brought its own, new, form of 'truth'. This music creates a sort of believable fiction through its own world of emotional and sensual gesture; it evokes a sort of consciousness sustained and developed in time and delineated by autonomous musical procedures or forms. This powerful musical fiction brings the various levels of verbal text alive in ways that would have been entirely foreign to most previous forms of music. Catherine Gallagher relates the development of the 'true fiction' of the novel specifically to modernity, to that attitude of speculation and scepticism that led the reader of novels to contemplate the believability of characters and actions, to hypothesize about motives and outcomes. This sort of fictionality stimulated the reader towards gauging the likelihood of possible scenarios, something vital in negotiating new forms of commerce and enterprise.⁵⁶ As Gallagher perceptively notes, ordinary people had to exercise the ability to disregard claims that all 'truths' were literal truths even in order to accept paper money. Consequently, most of the developments associated with modernity required precisely the kind of 'cognitive provisionality' developed in the novel, a sort of fiction that was accepted and fostered for some sort of practical convenience. The characters of novelistic fiction are open, inviting the reader to bring them to life, internalized in a way that would be impossible were they to represent actual people. This sort of internalization is not necessarily the direct identification with the characters that many critics of the perceived 'bourgeois sensibility' of the novel have assumed, but something much more open and flexible, enabling the reader to reflect on his or her own unfathomability in contrast to the knowability of the novelistic character. It is an exercise more in flexible self-creation than in recognizing a completed model of oneself behind the text. Moreover, as Descartes tried

⁵⁵ Bryan S. Turner, 'Periodization and Politics in the Postmodern', in Turner, *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity*, pp. 1–13, esp. p. 9.

⁵⁶ See Catherine Gallagher, 'The Rise of Fictionality', in Franco Moretti (ed.), *The Novel*, vol. 1, *History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 336–63.

to show in *Le Monde* (first published, well after his death, in 1664), the notion of fictional worlds becomes the prototype for the way we gain our knowledge of the real world, as if we were imitating God's creative capabilities, trying them out on a fictional world in order to adapt them to the real world. The Cartesian representation of the world becomes a form of metaphor, a representation of what things ideally should look like, rather than something essentially of a piece with nature, as metonymy.⁵⁷

Having brought up the relation of music, not only to modernity as a broad cultural attitude, but also to the novel, I am perhaps beginning to fall victim to a common problem in recent music scholarship. This is the tendency to translate music into other phenomena, to reduce it to more concrete and readable models, particularly the verbal. However, having used such models as analogies in order to bring music out of its habitually autonomous territory, I propose that the type of music I am addressing is specifically important because it also helps to constitute modernity in the actual process of reflecting, opposing or interacting with it. Taking the novelistic analogy as a starting point, it is clear that most forms of music relate to narrative in the broadest way (that is, to a human sense of organization in time, rather than necessarily to the specific implication of a storyline) and also to some sort of voice.⁵⁸ Indeed, the latter can – as in novels – be overtly multiple, but, given the way lines and gestures may be combined simultaneously in music, this can present multiple voices and associated viewpoints in a way that is entirely unique. While some forms of musical narrative can come closer to the novelistic than others – sonata form, for instance, in its relation to novels of the Enlightenment era – what is significant is that a narrative element is palpable in music precisely because it is performed in time.

A 'modern' listener might try to piece together elements of narrative in any music that contains a plethora of events and gestures (even if the emerging temporality is relatively static or recursive). Indeed, it is the implication of a stronger form of listenership – akin to the reader of a novel – that makes music so significant in the development of the modern subject. In hearing relationships both between figure and ground and

⁵⁷ Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation*, pp. 92–4, 189–90.

⁵⁸ I use the term 'narrative' here in its broadest sense, as covering the way human understanding is organized in relation to time, thus implying that most music evokes a sort of temporality, even if this may be relatively cyclical or even static. This broader concept of narrative is theorized at exhaustive length by Paul Ricoeur, in his *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols. (University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985, 1988).

between events passing in time, one is not just testing out a possible world, as one might in reading a novel, but exercising a real form of consciousness over time. And what is specifically significant about this form of consciousness is that it is purposely artificial, based on fictional musical events. This is a consciousness different from – say – an exercise in co-ordinating one's listening with an assumed harmony of the spheres or with a model that amplifies our prior sense of identity.

Issues of reception

Bach's Passions are also significant on account of their history of reception: the Matthew Passion was absolutely central to the canonization of Bach in the nineteenth century, when it was retroactively defined as one of the masterpieces of classical music. Virtually everyone connected with Mendelssohn's restoration of the Matthew Passion in 1829 had no doubts that they were dealing with a musical work of the highest value – even the greatest of all time, according to the singer of the part of Jesus, Eduard Devrient, and the music journalist A.B. Marx.⁵⁹ What was particularly unusual about this situation was the fact that Bach's Passion was considerably older than the type of music these commentators normally considered 'great works'. Older music could undoubtedly command great respect, not least if it provided a sort of model for compositional technique (Bach's music was particularly useful in this regard), but to accord a piece of music a century old the same sort of status as a Beethoven symphony was clearly something very different. The Matthew Passion gained a prestige in 1829 that it could never have had before, yet this prestige was itself historically conditioned, something that might be here one year and gone the next.⁶⁰ Even within this historically conditioned definition of 'great' musical works, an urgent issue still remains: if the Matthew Passion was so attractive in 1829 it must surely have contained or represented elements that resonated with the Classical–Romantic work concept, elements that Bach might not necessarily have intended and that

⁵⁹ See Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin – Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn's Revival of the St Matthew Passion* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 1, 8 (n. 14), 119, 121.

⁶⁰ Carl Dahlhaus suggests using the concept of the *point de la perfection* as a way of describing the *kairos* or high-water mark in the reception history of a particular work or repertory. This is particularly useful in capturing the fact that the reception of pieces of music is not necessarily a history of ever-increasing value and influence. See his *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J.B. Robinson (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 156–8.

were fortuitously misread/misheard by Mendelssohn and his colleagues. This issue relates back to the historiographical relation between modernity as a broader age stretching back to the Renaissance (to which Bach would, unremarkably, belong) and a stronger sense of 'the modern' most commonly associated with the later eighteenth century, together with the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth. Part of the argument of this book is that the stronger modernity is partially constituted through Bach's musical embodiment of the productive tension between pre-modern and modern elements.

The success of the Matthew Passion (within classical music culture, at least) also generates questions about the John Passion, which was equally available for restoration in 1829. This clearly did not command anything close to the same respect as the Matthew Passion, enjoying far fewer performances and often written off as a hurried and functional work.⁶¹ Nonetheless, this smaller Passion did begin to gain ground during the twentieth century, with, for instance, Friedrich Smend's exhaustive study in 1926 of what he believed to be its profound theological content,⁶² and also the espousal of the Passion by prominent musical figures (e.g. Benjamin Britten). By the time the historical performance movement was in full swing in the 1970s, the John Passion tended to be treated as a viable alternative to the Matthew Passion, on absolutely equal terms. Theologians such as Jaroslav Pelikan couched the difference between the two Passions in terms of theological attitude rather than musical quality (in his view, atonement as 'satisfaction' in the case of the Matthew Passion, and as 'Christus Victor' in the John Passion).⁶³

All this was surely not just a matter of critics perceiving qualities in the John Passion that had somehow been missed before, but a change in the way musical quality was valued. In some sense, this must be a factor of the type of relativistic flattening that any historicizing movement can bring (where everything from the past tends to be equally valued), but there must be more to it than that. Perhaps the John Passion became attractive on account of a newly found interest in alternatives to the 'standard' classical canon. Reciprocally, the Matthew Passion no longer has the central place in the repertoires of symphony orchestras that it had

⁶¹ Philipp Spitta, for instance, opined that the 'St John Passion is far inferior to the St Matthew, or even to the St Luke . . . as a whole, it displays a certain murky monotony and vague mistiness'; see his *Johann Sebastian Bach – His Work and Influence on the Music of Germany, 1685–1750*, trans. Clara Bell and J.A. Fuller-Maitland (London and New York: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1889, reprinted 1951), vol. 2, p. 526.

⁶² Friedrich Smend, 'Die Johannes-Passion von Bach', *Bjb* 37 (1926), 105–28.

⁶³ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Bach among the Theologians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), pp. 89–115.

before the advent of historical performance. The public disgrace of not performing in the 'approved' historical style was simply too heavy to bear for cash-strapped orchestras; moreover, the Passion's traditional outing on Good Friday began to make much less sense as the public grew ever more indifferent to the notion of such a Friday. Greatly valued and still performed the Mathew Passion might remain, but no longer as an unquestioned part of mainstream repertory.

Already this thumbnail sketch of the reception of the two Passions suggests that much must surely lie in the changing values of different times and places: the clear preference for one Passion over the other during the nineteenth century becomes increasingly modified in the later twentieth, as the place of both works is reformulated, both slightly estranged from the canonical mainstream, as if fenced off in the historicist nature preserve of early music. The Bach Passions thus sit astride the fields of rediscovered 'early music' and the canon of so-called 'classical music' (itself fed by a process of rediscovery in the case of Mendelssohn's 1829 performance of the Matthew Passion); they lie both inside and outside the tradition, but in slightly different ways.

It might then begin to seem that the understanding and valuation of all types of music are purely a function of the reception in any particular time or place, that works are somehow inaccessible 'in themselves'. Although this currently fashionable view has been a major corrective to the modernist tendency to fetishize works of art, there is surely something unsatisfactory about an approach that always knows the answer in advance ('the meaning/value of X lies in its reception at time T, by people P'). Fill in the blanks and you have understood all there is (or that is legitimate) to know about Bach's Passions. Surely, pieces of music are like any other form of human construction: whatever the patterns of intention lying behind them, they instantaneously acquire an element of autonomy whether we wish them to or not.⁶⁴ I would suggest that pieces of music, or of any art for that matter, can affect us in ways that we could not expect – not because they have some secret property that only posterity reveals, or

⁶⁴ This point is made very strongly by Bruno Latour in his study of the history of science, *Pandora's Hope – Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). He suggests that even in so apparently verifiable a field as science there is a constant dialectic between fact and artefact (p. 125), and between a constructivist epistemology and a realist one (pp. 129–32). Following his reasoning for the world in general, it is the case neither that there is music 'out there' waiting to be described and understood correctly once and for all (p. 141), nor that everything we can say about music is entirely a function of our cultural presuppositions, but that the interaction between music and reception is both subtle and unpredictable.

purely because our climate of reception predisposes us to see or value something that was irrelevant before, but because there is an unpredictable and circulating relation between the piece and its reception – it is not merely a one-way process. From this point of view, the favourable reception of the Matthew Passion in 1829 might have involved as many elements that were unexpected – not hitherto formulated as carrying cultural value – as those that resonated with current concepts.

How, then, does the sequence of my chapters address the basic question of Bach's dialogue with modernity? As I have already stated, any developing definitions of modernity work in a circular relation with the musical study, each aspect informing the other. Given the predominant function of the Lutheran liturgy as a means of cultivating and reinforcing the individual's faith, an obvious starting point is the question of the way this music relates to the individual. The solidification of the individual consciousness as something with its own degree of independence and autonomy is an essential aspect of modernity, one which was partly seeded in the Reformation itself. But is not the variety of individualities within modernity so extremely great as to render the concept of a 'modern subject' meaningless? Charles Taylor provides a useful starting point by linking the growing sense of internalization with the move against an external, pre-existent order that is 'found' and that determines our station and role in life, and more towards a form or order that is made, or internally discovered, within our own minds. This is something made overt in Descartes's work on subjectivity, particularly in the *Discours de la Méthode* (1637), and later developed on a much more complex scale by Kant.⁶⁵

Something of this inward turn was already evident in Augustine (a fundamental inspiration for Luther's Reformation), but with him it was coupled with a sense of our moral sources as lying outside us (like Plato's cosmos), moral sources that are by definition good. A telling comparison can be made between Augustine's *Confessions*, on the one hand, and Rousseau's, on the other: Augustine's are carried out according to a particular type (e.g. the convert who, through various temptations, eventually finds the right path to a divine, pre-existent, truth), while Rousseau's are a search for that which is specifically unique to the self.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self – The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 124, 152.

⁶⁶ See H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 132–5.

Charles Taylor suggests that there were two discernible sides to emergent modern subjectivities around 1700, thus when Bach was reaching adulthood: self-control and self-construction on the one hand and the sense of the self as a unique particular waiting to be discovered, on the other.⁶⁷

The focus on the individual as someone with specific responsibilities of self-development and constructed through the application of a discipline (from both within and without) is endemic to Protestant practice in general. Moreover, this tendency underwent particular developments closer to Bach's own age, both at the macro level (the increasing emphasis on the absolute monarch at the expense of inherited structures of aristocratic and municipal government), and at the level of the individual (with the new emphasis on personal feeling and conversion within the broader Lutheran movement, and specifically within Pietism). The sense of subjectivity at both these levels is specifically pertinent to Bach's Passions: the central subject of both Passions is undoubtedly Jesus himself, represented not just in the way his words are set and sung, but also by the way the music *around* his characterization works to magnify his presence. The Evangelist's narration of his harrowing fate, together with the strongly felt reactions and personal statements of the ariosos and arias in 'our' present, are part of the same musical event that brings him to representation. Within the political climate of Bach's own time, the increasing focus on the absolute ruler would have been nothing without the attitude of the subjects around him, 'authorizing' his power, to adopt a term from Hobbes. While in appearance this might seem similar to traditional structures of order, in which everyone has his or her pre-established place, Hobbes's monarch has power by virtue of the authorization from below, rather than exercising a natural power that is distributed downwards.⁶⁸ Bach's 'musical commonwealth' creates for its 'monarch' a degree of presence that has scarcely been exceeded, yet this presence lies in the

⁶⁷ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 185.

⁶⁸ See Kraynak, *History and Modernity*, pp. 179–80: the 'author' (individual subject) is the 'real' person with real power, while the 'representative' (monarch) is the artificial construct, but whose commands thus bind the author as if these were ordained by the author himself. While, in one sense, the concept of absolutism deprived the individual of certain powers and rights, in another it intensified the individual's activity by greatly developing the precise role he (and normally 'he' in the seventeenth century) was expected to play. This was something particularly evident in military organization under absolutism, which Bach himself seems to have envied in his comments about the musicians of Dresden, who were only expected to play one instrument within the court orchestra, but at the highest possible level. See Ulrich Siegele, 'Bach and the Domestic Politics of Electoral Saxony', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 17–34.

world created by the music; it is not something that the music merely reflects or depicts.

Equally striking are the individual characters themselves, given voice in the arias and meditative choruses. These are presences that invite us to share in their experience, even to become one with them. The role of subjectivity in this music is not merely a question of representing historical personages, or even the typical citizen to whom Bach and his librettists addressed their works, but involves the development of emotion and consciousness on the part of any individual listener who is prepared to give the music some degree of attention. This is something subtly different from the standard role of a listener empathizing with the representation of a character within an operatic role, since the characters developed within the 'present' of Bach's Passions are themselves listeners and witnesses to the representation of Jesus' Passion. They stand, like us, in the time of the storytelling rather than in the secondary time of the represented story.⁶⁹

Given this emphasis on types of subjectivity emerging in the process of the performance, the next obvious topic is therefore the way in which time is involved in the development of the various kinds of individual consciousness and how the temporality of performance relates to the larger-scale implications of a religion dating from the latter years of the ancient world. Do the Passions create a sense of linear time, everything changing irrevocably in the course of performance, or do the recurring and repetitive elements suggest something more cyclic, governed by eternal truths and laws?⁷⁰ Do the notions of progress and change, undoubted tendencies of the modern age, mean that the Passion story has to be interpreted in a transformational way that could not have been possible before? Does Christian eschatology somehow coincide with some of the more utopian ideals of modern progress?

How does this relate to the personal, subjective consciousness of time? If Christianity itself already occupies some of the modern forms of subjectivity, it may also have provided some of the impetus for the development of the modern notions of subjective time, especially if Augustine's perceptive meditations on time are anything to go by. With the neo-Augustinian emphasis on personal development engendered by

⁶⁹ Karol Berger, *Bach's Cycle*, p. 107, observes that, since it is the narrator who brings the story to life, the 'time of the storytelling is ontologically prior, more fundamental, than the time of the story told'.

⁷⁰ One of the central theses of Berger's *Bach's Cycle*, *Mozart's Arrow* is that Bach's Matthew Passion shows the composer's determination to subvert the linear principle to the cyclic and eternal. This issue will be explored further in Chapter 2.

the Reformation, there was increasing attention on the way time was harnessed towards the cultivation of sustained consciousness and awareness of being. Time became for the soul what, in early modernity, extension became for the body; the soul became a living biography of itself.⁷¹ It may well be that Bach's music can demonstrate the subjective consciousness of time, in terms both of the abstract consciousness represented by each singer–personage in the actual process of singing and, particularly, of the way this could be mapped by the attentive listener. Time consciousness did not become a matter of sustained intellectual study until the turn of the twentieth century (in, for instance, the literature of Proust and the philosophy of Husserl and Bergson); but modern novelists and philosophers undoubtedly built their systems on much that had already been articulated through the arts, and especially in music.

Having explored some of the parameters of subjectivity as part of what is both represented and potentially developed by the listener, through the interaction of musical and subjective time, how are we encouraged to interpret what we experience? Does the music simply transmit obvious meanings latent in the texts (whether biblical or of more recent origins), or does it encourage us to find deeper meanings lying behind the literal sense of the text? Does the music involve the sorts of connection that had been part of the Christian hermeneutic tradition right from the time that Paul (and indeed Jesus himself) co-opted the Old Testament in the service of the New? If music can indeed perform this wider hermeneutic function – making connections and relationships in its own right – does this not mean that it can 'slip its moorings'⁷² and tell us many more things besides?

This possibility of infinite significance, going beyond the seemingly closed parameters of the assumed function and purpose of the music, is perhaps one of the ways in which music might work within modernity. The sense of almost threatening infinitude was something directly stimulated by the new sciences, with the closed universe already destabilized by the Copernican revolution. The most heretical scientists and philosophers of the seventeenth century often adopted a 'maximalist' approach to existing knowledge and conceptions, pushing these to their limits, and thereby changing the assumptions and purposes with which they began.⁷³

⁷¹ See Ferguson, *Modernity and Subjectivity*, p. 94.

⁷² I borrow this phrase from Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*, e.g. pp. 371, 373.

⁷³ For a study of parallels between Bach's musical thinking and that of philosophers who likewise pushed the existing conventions into unexpected territories, see my '“A Mind Unconscious that It Is Calculating”? Bach and the Rationalist Philosophy of Wolff, Leibniz and Spinoza', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 60–71.

In Bach's case, it is as if he had entered into a 'Faustian pact', by which he sought for his music an extraordinarily strong power in articulating and enhancing faith within the Lutheran religion, but in doing so gave to music an autonomous logic and referential power that goes well beyond the original purpose and which could equally well serve perspectives antithetical to dogma.

One way in which Bach's music surely works on us is through its contrapuntal nature, something that goes well beyond the specifically musical technique of combining melodies. Not only are texts combined in various ways, both simultaneously and in linear sequence, but each musical line and gesture brings a host of historical associations and connections which mutually inflect one another. Through this ready-made conversation, which even in strictly historicist terms contains considerable openness, the listener is invited to make connections and inferences, inevitably introducing his or her own perspectives and experiences. A listener or scholar armed with the 'correct' theological presuppositions will not fail to draw the 'correct' spiritual and theological meanings from the works – no one can doubt their supreme significance for those who are attuned both to music and to the Christian message. But, my argument runs, with this development of hermeneutic depth through combination, polyphony and allusion, something richer in its potential meanings and implications emerges, something very different from most music of the pre-modern world. Bach was creating something that had the potential to adhere to many more contexts and cultural expectations than much previous music.

This music invites a form of 'soft' hermeneutics – as defined by Carolyn Abbate – by which it contains gestures, associations and allusions that might correspond to what we can construct as the reaction of a historical listener. But rather than necessarily fading into a 'low' hermeneutics (where music is assumed to function like a code, so that what the composer encoded now yields definite meanings),⁷⁴ the 'soft' hermeneutics can lead in the opposite direction, towards the potentially infinite interplay of gestures that even singly seem to connote a broad range of possibilities. What is striking, then, is not the possibility of specific meanings as such, but an increased sense of 'meaningfulness' (similar to what Abbate aptly calls 'stickiness'). This artistic enhancement of religious

⁷⁴ Carolyn Abbate, 'Music – Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Spring 2004), 505–36, esp. pp. 516, 523, and 'Cipher and Performance in Sternberg's *Dishonored*', in Karol Berger and Anthony Newcomb (eds.), *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 357–92, esp. p. 367 (and p. 388, n. 15).

practice – perhaps to unprecedented levels – brings with it the potential detachment of the work from its specifically religious context (something that was amply demonstrated by the nineteenth-century revival of Bach's Passions).

The type of polyphony that seems to emerge from the hermeneutic approach has something in common with the most innovative literary genre to emerge around the time of Bach (even if it blossomed in Germany a little while after his death), namely the modern novel. The openness of meaning and the multiplicity of voice in the novel lead me on to consider the voices we hear in the Bach Passions, and their types: do we hear the voices of specific characters, the voices of individual singers themselves or a guiding authorial voice, which we might infer to be Bach's, or the Evangelist's, or even that of God himself (since, for many, God is the source of all Scripture)? And, if there is indeed the sense of voice, or several voices, what sort of authority does this voice have and how is it mediated or shared? Examination of Bach's original scoring for both Passions suggests that, in his own performances at least, the voices that became most prominent were those of the main singers themselves, each sharing several roles but each profiled through his or 'her' individual consistency of sound (Bach's singers were all male, but there are clear textual allusions to the female subject position).

Beyond this immediate sense of voice in performance, I suggest that the most 'modern' aspect of the musical style, the development of a fully flexible and flowing tonality, gives the music its own sort of authority as a voice in its own right, with its varying pace and 'modulation'. This modulating voice brings the verbal narrative to presence, mirroring the sort of third-person authority that the writer of each Gospel confers on the story he narrates. Again, it is the mechanism of tonal narrative rather than any specific character or 'code' that provides this semblance of authority, a specifically artificial element that renders both the story and its simultaneous interpretation that much more immediate and convincing. Ironically then, a story that, from the Christian point of view, must necessarily be true, is given a particularly modern sense of reality through the mobilization of a rationalized, historically conditioned system. Bach may unwittingly have demonstrated Hobbes's view that no man can submit himself to Scripture without committing himself to a specific worldly interpretation.⁷⁵ Just

⁷⁵ See Hobbes, *Elements* II, quoted in Kraynak, *History and Modernity*, p. 72. This is also a central claim of Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670): see Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

as music is devised to depict a particular reality in as deep and committed a manner as possible, it imparts something of its own form or flavour on that of which it is presumed to be the effect, a phenomenon that has also been observed as a characteristic of the 'naturalistic' turn in painting within Western modernity.⁷⁶ Perhaps this might give us some insight into the way in which Bach's intuitions of the potential of modernity go beyond the naturalism of his critic Scheibe's party: acknowledging the significance of nature is undoubtedly part of the modern condition, but it was the Bachian approach that showed that nature is as much constituted through art – that is, as a human construction – as providing the model that art must faithfully depict.⁷⁷

If this music does indeed seem authoritative and convincing, it obviously shares something with the field of rhetoric, which has long been a topic of interest in Bach studies. Again, it is a question of mechanisms working in time rather than the specific content or 'message', on which so many rhetorical studies tend to concentrate. Much about this music seems to reinforce itself through emphasis, variation and repetition, yet there is also surely an element of the unexpected and open. In other words, this music is clearly composed from a rhetorical perspective, designed to reinforce a truth that is already presupposed and believed by the listener (an archetypally 'pre-modern' stance), but the result is not always merely a reinforcement of the pre-existing message. In other words, this music is also dialectical in nature, something most obviously suggested by the dialogic elements (already emerging in the John Passion and entirely essential to the Matthew Passion), but working on several other levels besides. It takes to the highest level the sense of certainty that so much of the pre-modern world seemed to assume, but it thereby results in a kind of openness and subtle change that is endemic to modernity. Bach's attitude towards musical invention is to explore the potential in the material that seems to underlie each musical piece or movement, as if this were somehow already latent, merely awaiting the composer's realization. But far from this being a compositional process that relies on a specific system or methodology, the resulting structures are startlingly individual, neither the direct exemplification of rhetorical recipes nor the confirmation or

⁷⁶ See Christopher Braider, *Refiguring the Real – Picture and Modernity in Word and Image 1400–1700* (Princeton University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 5–6, for the association of this reversal with the Western experience in all its phases.

⁷⁷ See Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 219–44, for a perceptive study of how Bach's music can be heard as a critique of the Enlightenment, at least in its more simplistic, naturalistic phases.

subversion of established forms (as would characterize much of the music towards the end of the eighteenth century). This contributes to the dialectical nature of Bach's Passions, the way in which music and text not only complement but also inflect one another, the way in which the relationship between singer and instruments and between different aspects of musical inventions, all result in a sense of change. Such a sense of change is all the more remarkable against the background of a musical style that still places consistency of texture and evenness of event continuum at a premium. This is a music that seems supremely wedded to a world of certainty and interconnectedness, yet its results, for many listeners at least, seem to be utterly unexpected and transformative. Again, it is not a matter of Bach being specifically progressive, up to date or 'ahead of his time' but rather that he seems to have embodied the mechanisms of a modernity that is crucially dependent on the materials of the past, transforming these through processes of combination, expressive intensity and dispassionate 'research'.

What, then, emerges as my purpose in writing a study of this kind? There is no point in denying that I am writing from a particular standpoint within our contemporary condition, one that is conscious that there are many elements of modernity that are worth maintaining and regenerating. While it is absolutely obvious that there are also many sides to modernity that merit considerable criticism – its rigidity of method, its abstract, dehumanizing tendencies – it is also clear that the wholesale rejection of it by self-proclaimed postmoderns has not led to an improvement in the human condition and, if anything, has accentuated some of the worst aspects of modernity itself (such as the tying of all value to capitalist, market forces, and crediting this as a sort of democracy, even when its motivations are entirely those of greed). Through their counterpoint of modern with pre-modern elements, Bach's Passions perhaps provide a critique of modernity, almost in the manner of a 'prior corrective', as some have suggested for Shakespeare's achievement.⁷⁸ What is most valuable about the modern condition is certainly not its rigid methodologies and rationalization of every aspect of the life world, but the way it generates new opportunities through the combination and inflection of diverse elements and perspectives – an attitude of permanent dialogue.

⁷⁸ See Lars Engle, 'Measure for Measure and Modernity: The Problem of the Sceptic's Authority', in Hugh Grady (ed.), *Shakespeare and Modernity – Early Modern to Millennium* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 85–104, esp. p. 85.

1 | Bach's Passions and the construction of early modern subjectivities

It is my thesis in this chapter that one of the factors that has rendered the Matthew Passion so successful over the course of its reception lies in its evocation of subjectivities that somehow resonate with those of the broader modern condition. Some define the modern age itself as one that is marked by a new type of subjectivity characterized by individualism and autonomy of action.¹ I would suggest that modern forms of subjectivity are among the most crucial elements conditioning musical works of the Classic-Romantic tradition, which might embody, represent or suggest particular ways of conceiving the self.² Perhaps, given the difference in their respective receptions, the forms of subjectivity evoked in the Matthew Passion are more 'modern' than those of the John Passion. But, if the John Passion relates to different forms of subjectivity (or none at all), this may well be significant in relation to the work's increased prestige during the course of the twentieth century. If we are indeed now living in an era when the hold of the stronger, Romantic musical work concept is loosening, there might be some pertinent parallels between the cultural issues of Bach's era and our own: in his, the stronger concept was emerging, in ours it is dispersing (or at least diversifying).³

¹ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity – Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 1987), pp. 16–17, 83.

² Naomi Cumming's study of an aria from the Matthew Passion actively associates a sense of 'persona' with the musical work, building on the idea of melodic persona first put forward by Edward Cone. See her 'The Subjectivities of "Erbarne Dich"', *Music Analysis* 16/1 (1997), 5–44, esp. 11–12.

³ Obviously, my argument is greatly influenced here by the debate surrounding Lydia Goehr's proposition that the 'work concept' was a historical construction that fell into place around 1800. By considering modernity in its broader historical span and examining Bach's Passions in terms of a dialogue between modern and pre-modern elements, I hope that this study will add more nuance to the debate. Seminal writings include: Carl Dahlhaus, *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte* (1977), trans. J. B. Robinson as *Foundations of Music History* (Cambridge University Press, 1983); Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: an Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford University Press, 1992); 'On the Problems of Dating' or "Looking Backward and Forward with Strohm", in Michael Talbot (ed.), *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* (University of Liverpool Press, 2000), pp. 231–46; Heinz von Loesch, *Der Werkbegriff in der protestantischen Musiktheorie des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts: ein Mißverständnis* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2001); Harold S. Powers, 'A Canonical Museum of Imaginary Music', *Current Musicology* 60–61 (1996), 5–25; Reinhard Strohm, 'Looking Back at Ourselves: the

The term 'subjectivity' embraces much more than the popular definition of it as representing a personal, characteristically biased and 'non-objective' view. It relates to the very concept of how humans are individuated, the degree of autonomy or uniqueness they might have, the degree to which they are particulars rather than instances of generalized norms (or tokens of a broader order of things). Do we find our foundations for knowledge and morality in the external world or somehow within ourselves?⁴ Is the 'I' to be developed with an intuition of extra-worldly uniqueness in mind, or is it something that can be realized in the 'now' of everyday existence? The term 'subject' might also evoke connotations contrary to those of autonomy or individuality, since it can indicate a position of subjugation, with the individual being *subject* to some greater power. It is important to keep this definition in mind, not least because it was the primary dictionary definition, at least in the seventeenth century.⁵

The most extensive reference work of the first half of the eighteenth century, prepared in Leipzig during Bach's time there, was J. H. Zedler's *Lexicon*. This gives a broad and systematic description of the term 'subject', beginning with its role in logic and sentence structure and including the ways it can relate to people. Two senses of human subject are described under the category of 'moral things', by which the 'subjectum activum' is the person to whom others are subject, and the 'subjectum passivum' a person subject to another. A further, relevant definition relates to the notion of a rounded person (as in 'Das ist ein fein Subjectum', which refers to a fine man, or a fine person).⁶ The active and passive senses of subject might depend on one another to some extent: greater autonomy often brings with it submission to some new authority; and being subject to a particular power sometimes gives one freedoms or forms of expression that one did not have before.

Bach's Passions provide a particularly good opportunity to consider issues of subjectivity since so much about their presentation of the Passion story is clearly targeted towards the individual believer, cultivating one's sense of sinful responsibility for the fate of Christ, and also rehearsing

Problem with the Musical Work-Concept', in Talbot, *The Musical Work*, pp. 128–52; Walter Wiora, *Das musikalische Kunstwerk* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1983).

⁴ This is one of the central questions of Charles Taylor's study *Sources of the Self – The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁵ See Mitchell Greenberg, *Subjectivity and Subjugation in Seventeenth-century Drama and Prose – The Family Romance of French Classicism* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 7–8.

⁶ Johann Heinrich Zedler (ed.), *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, 64 vols. (Halle and Leipzig, 1732–50); supplement, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1751–4), vol. 40, cols. 1545–8.

essential elements of religious practice. These might involve the development of a feeling of utmost dependence, a sense of the connection between Christ's Passion and the flawed individual's salvation and, above all, the need for the urgent regeneration of the individual's faith. To the Orthodox Lutheran, this latter is prior to any good works one might perform, since works will always be ineffectual compared with God's power and love, and inadequate in expiating the essential sinfulness of mankind. Good works are not, of course, to be discouraged, but they are to be seen more as the consequence of – and not the substitute for – faith. The Passions bring to the forefront that specifically 'modern' aspect of subjectivity that Luther's Reformation itself helped to inaugurate: the individual's responsibility to cultivate faith internally as the means towards salvation, without the external apparatus of traditional sacramental practice. One of Bach's most potent means of achieving this particular function lies in his provision of arias that evoke a definite human subject in the present, someone who does not represent a character in the story (however much he might empathize with a character or imitate his grief or guilt), but who belongs very much to our world. Thus Bach adapts an operatic convention (the aria, which represents the person and thoughts of a specific character within a time-bound musical frame) towards the development of a personage who relates to the listener 'off stage' rather than to the historical characters 'on stage'. This is of course the same technique that Bach (and many other contemporary church composers) employed in church cantatas, but in the Passions the effect is particularly potent because of the narrative core, which constitutes a world (and indeed a time) remote from that of the listener. The subjectivity projected in the arias is all the more striking for its contrast with the world of the narrative, drawing in the audience as actively implicated characters in their own right.⁷

⁷ Karol Berger draws attention to this contrast by suggesting that the represented individuals and collective faithful are of an ontological order different from that of the personages in the story. Nevertheless, he stresses that the contemplators are presented within the 'same representation as that within which the [historical] personages are presented'. This he proposes by analogy with the way worshipping donors or the faithful (contemporary with the painter) are often presented within paintings of the Madonna, joining two distinct worlds in a single representation. See Karol Berger, *Bach's Cycle*, p. 109. I would suggest, rather, that a performance of a Bach Passion cannot be considered as a single representation in the sense that a framed painting can (at most, it is a single *event*). What I am proposing in this study is that the religious function of the oratorio Passion in Lutheran liturgical practice is to create a very specific experience in the present, which, to the faithful, renders real the essential outcomes of the Passion story (such as the enduring and redeeming presence of the resurrected Christ and the strengthening of each individual's faith), while presenting the story itself as a separate represented world from the past. To see the two worlds merely as one *representation*, then, would suggest that the listener is necessarily separate from the performance and thus, to some degree, passive.

The other factor that makes Bach's Passions such an appropriate area for opening an enquiry into musical subjectivity is the figure of Jesus himself. This was the role that seems specifically to have attracted the singer and actor Eduard Devrient to the project of reviving the Matthew Passion in 1829; in the early nineteenth century it was clearly seen as something unusual. In both Passions, Jesus is obviously the supreme 'subject' in the sense of being both topic and personage. The way his part is represented musically, but also evoked as a human presence, might well tell us much about Bach's methods of evoking a supreme form of human subjectivity through music. The reality of Jesus' presence is infinitely more crucial in Bach's religious context than that of a wholly fictional or mythological figure, since the entire belief system rests on the reality of Christ as an ever-present help to each individual within it.

It might already be clear from this Lutheran context that newer conceptions of the individual did not necessarily always spring from a deeper confidence in the human condition, but could have been just as much a reaction to the loss of certainty in the wider order of things (such as in the institutions of the Roman church). If music might reflect and help to fashion stronger conceptions of the human subject, there is also the possibility that music's increased formal structuring during the century leading up to Bach acted as a *compensation* for the severing of any assumed continuity with natural order. A sense of musical autonomy (e.g. stand-alone pieces with their own internal 'laws' or personages defined more strongly through musical patterning) might represent the need for a surrogate order as much as it expresses a confidence in the early modern condition. Something of this new, compensatory, understanding of art in general – and music in particular – begins to emerge in the writings of Rousseau, in the generation just after Bach.⁸ It is precisely the same impulse that Georg Lukács associates with the birth of the novel around the beginning of the seventeenth century (specifically with Cervantes' *Don Quixote*), one that found its particular flowering in its formal, compensatory elements.⁹ There is a sense in which the novel (and particularly in its subjective constructions) performs an important function through its very fictionality, and perhaps something similar could be said of the

⁸ See Julia Simon, 'Rousseau and Aesthetic Modernity: Music's Power of Redemption', *Eighteenth-century Music* 2/1 (2005), 41–56, esp. 47.

⁹ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel – A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1916), trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971/1999), esp. p. 130.

expansion in formal (or self-referential) musical procedures around the same time (see p. 23).

In the case of Bach's Passions, it would be perverse to doubt that Bach intended to write music that he believed to be intimately connected to God's order in terms of its substance, semantics and rhetorical effect in the act of worship. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the search for compensatory, autonomous elements in Bach's works is invalid (or indeed entirely contradictory). There is the obvious fact that these pieces are patently 'overwritten' – going in scale beyond anything that could possibly have been demanded by the liturgy or patterns of worship. The music dominates the liturgy like no other: however long the sermon heard at the midpoint of each Passion, the music influences the experience in a way that is almost impossible to resist. Perhaps, then, the scale and sumptuousness of these musical settings function as a form of 're-enchantment', a compensation for the uncertainties of Bach's cultural and political environment.¹⁰

It is reasonably easy to identify self-reflexive elements in Bach's Passions, such as in the repetitions of chorale melodies, internal allusions to music heard earlier, symmetrical patternings of pieces and circulations of keys. Certainly, these elements make both Passions 'worlds' in themselves, but, given the richness of theological allusion that comes with such devices, these elements do not automatically render the music more autonomous. Indeed, they are regularly (and probably correctly) associated with the sorts of rhetorical device employed in sermons and therefore directly connected to theological purposes.¹¹ More significant are the obvious differences between the two Passions. The John Passion is very much tethered to the continuous and richly disputatious texture of the Gospel text. The free, meditative elements, particularly the arias, tend to be centrifugally scattered to the outer reaches of the piece, so as not to disturb the relentless events and arguments of the narrative. The Matthew Passion, on the other hand, is ordered by the sequence of meditative recitatives

¹⁰ On the concepts of 'disenchantment' and 're-enchantment' in early Baroque music see Daniel K. L. Chua, 'Vincenzo Galilei, Modernity and the Division of Nature', in Suzannah Clark and Alexander Rehding (eds.), *Music Theory and Natural Order from the Renaissance to the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 17–29.

¹¹ This is the overall approach adopted by Eric Chafe's *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991). Evidence connecting Bach's Passion libretti to the Lutheran sermon tradition is presented by Elke Axmacher in 'Eine Quellenfund zum Text der Matthäus-Passion', *BjB* 64 (1978), 181–91, and 'Aus Liebe will mein Heyland sterben' – *Untersuchungen zum Wandel des Passionsverständnisses im frühen 18. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Carus, 1984).

and arias provided by Picander's libretto (even texts that are set chorally, such as the opening number, are generally termed 'arias' in the libretto).¹² These interrupt the narrative continuity of the story, representing an order of thought – often extremely emotional – that methodically divides the Gospel text. A systematic, meditative approach to Scripture was hardly new, and indeed the structure of Bach and Picander is not unlike a Lutheran analogue of the Stations of the Cross. But it is impossible to ignore the sheer musical dominance of this procedure, far beyond anything in previous Passion settings. However much the music is designed to deepen the meditation on the implications of the Gospel story, its presence in terms of extended, formalized and exquisitely characterized pieces is surely the dominant force, one that brings its own sense of order and rational control.

Rationalization is also immediately evident in the tonal structures of both Passions. Max Weber, one of the first theorists of modernity, specifically observed the move away from 'natural' tuning towards tempered systems as part of the broader process of rationalization (see p. 11). Human capabilities are greatly enhanced by the imposition of an ordered, rational system that patently ignores the 'natural purity' of musical intervals in order to extend the tonal system. Music moves out of the natural world into a seemingly richer, albeit artificial, world of its own. In a Weberian sense, both Bach Passions, but particularly the Matthew, would belong to the historical process of rationalization. While the two cycles of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* represent this historical development in the most tangible and ordered way, one still has the option of retuning the instrument for each piece or selection, in order to preserve the largest number of pure intervals. In the Passions, which were undoubtedly designed as continuous events, one is literally forced into realms such as A^b minor (in Matthew Passion, 59, 'Ach Golgatha') that – at least for the fixed-pitch instruments – take one well beyond 'the natural'. It is tempting here to embrace Adorno's suggestion that Bach's clear absorption of the modern trend towards rationalization was 'reconciled with the voice of humanity which in reality was stifled by that trend at the moment of its inception'.¹³ Bach's exploration of the new tonal system helps to structure

¹² Picander's libretto was first published in his *Ernst-Schertzhafte und Satyrische Gedichte*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1729) and is available in facsimile in the Critical Report (Kritischer Bericht) volume of the *Neue Bach Ausgabe* for the Matthew Passion (II/5), ed. Alfred Dürr, pp. 73–8.

¹³ T. W. Adorno, 'Bach Defended against His Devotees', in *Prisms (Prismen)*, Frankfurt am Main, 1967), trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 133–46, p. 139.

and order the presentation of the story and its meditative elements together, and also extends the type of expression possible from both its singers and its instrumentalists.

The degree to which Bach's Passions embrace elements that are essentially artificial in order to create a deeper sense both of order and expression brings us back to the question of subjectivities, the ways in which the human subject may also formulate itself as a quasi-fictional entity. The next section will examine the development of various modern forms of subjectivity, and will be followed by an investigation of Bach's own subjective stance as both human and musician. With this background in mind, I will return to a closer consideration of how various forms of subjectivity are constructed within the two Passions.

The development of modern subjectivities

This study can hardly cover every aspect of the evolution of early modern forms of subjectivity. I will try and give an account of some of the developments that took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with a view to providing the historical and cultural background for the claims I will make later about the construction of subjectivity in Bach's Passions (this section could be skipped by readers impatient for a discussion of more specifically musical matters). At the outset, it is important not to overestimate the difference between modern forms of subjectivity and those that might have occurred before or indeed continued to endure. Jacob Burckhardt surely exaggerates when he suggests that human consciousness before the Renaissance was essentially half-awake and that 'Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation – only through some general category.' To Burckhardt, it was only with the Italian Renaissance's inauguration of objectivity and subjectivity (by which man recognized himself as an individual potentially separate from everything else) that the post-medieval awakening was set on course.¹⁴ This surely misrepresents what must have been a much more subtle and varied form of human existence before the Renaissance;¹⁵ and

¹⁴ Stephen Cohen, '(Post)modern Elizabeth: Gender, Politics, and the Emergence of Modern Subjectivity', in Hugh Grady (ed.), *Shakespeare and Modernity – Early Modern to Millennium* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 20–39, p. 20, quoting Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London: Penguin, 1965), p. 81.

¹⁵ As Stephen Greenblatt notes, 'Chaucer's extraordinarily subtle and wry manipulations of *persona*' show that the sense of self that emerged in sixteenth-century England did not simply

it also obscures the fact that identifications with religious, racial, national or social categories – over and above any forms of individuality – have retained a considerable degree of significance right up to the present day. There is always the tendency to characterize the pre-modern subject as an ‘other’, subjected to a slave mentality, and to assume that the modern subject is gloriously free and inevitably superior (and – more often than not – quietly assimilated to an assumed bourgeois norm).¹⁶ If we are to uncover specifically ‘modern’ forms of subjectivity these are likely to stand side by side with many earlier forms and indeed might themselves have been sporadically manifest before. Most crucial though are those forms of subjectivity that may have attained a degree of dominance – and a clarity of articulation – during the modern era of which they are partly definitive.

There may be some truth in the view that Christianity promoted a heightened sense of the human subject, in terms of both the focus on Jesus as fully human as well as divine, and the responsibility placed on the individual believer to achieve union with Christ for ultimate salvation. Habermas suggests that one of the greatest cultural achievements of the West – the capacity to decentre one’s own perspective and to adopt a degree of self-critical distance from one’s traditions – is moulded by the Judeo-Christian tradition itself.¹⁷ The notion of sacrificing the present moment for the sake of some future apotheosis might also help to elevate the self-image of the individual towards the status of divine substance, a sort of ‘trickery’ that might account for both the success and the destructiveness of Western progress.¹⁸ With Augustine, there developed a critical sense of inwardness – a sense of being able to think in a way separated from our experience of the real world – that was crucial for the later development of modern subjectivity. But the essential difference lay in the fact that the power Augustine discovered within was not his own but was itself part of the external order of things; it was a matter of

appear out of nowhere; *Renaissance Self-Fashioning – From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago University Press, 1980, new edn 2005), p. 1.

¹⁶ Fredric Jameson observes that ‘What [consciousness] was before [modernity] is less often said, although one can assume that the otherness of the pre-modern must necessarily go hand in hand with unfreeness, obedience, and the subjection of a slave mentality and an irredeemably subaltern life-stance. (Thus “free” imperceptibly modulates into “bourgeois”); *A Singular Modernity – Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 53.

¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality – Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, ed., with an introduction, by Eduardo Mendieta (Oxford: Polity, 2002), p. 154.

¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment (Dialektik der Aufklärung, 1944)*, trans. John Cumming (London and New York, Verso, 1997), p. 51.

recognizing or rediscovering an internal aspect of God's cosmos that was by definition good.¹⁹

As I have noted already, the Reformation provided a renewed focus on the individual's responsibility for spiritual progress (something soon to be reabsorbed into Catholic practice too, as in the renewed fervour for spiritual exercises). With the new-found authority of the Bible as a text unmediated by tradition, there was a serious challenge to the scholastic norm of basing all reasoning on previous authority;²⁰ now it was up to individuals (well some, at least, and often at their own peril) to draw their own conclusions from Scripture, developing a form of interiority which began to replace that formerly engineered by institutionalized penitence.²¹ Indeed, Thomas More's (unfavourable) description of the Lutheran heretics as isolated, and cutting themselves off from the past, highlights a fundamental feature of the modern mindset in general. This became more overt among the more progressive figures of the seventeenth century, those who were ever suspicious of inherited authority.²²

Greenblatt's conception of Renaissance self-fashioning – the new 'self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process' – also brings with it the sense that human subjects were still largely products of relations of power, the range of choices still largely stipulated by the ideological systems at hand. Indeed new models of power were created specifically to control the energies released by the decline of older, feudal practices. Much of the advice in Castiglione's 'Art of the Courtier' (*Il libro del Cortegiano*, 1528) is not geared towards individuality as such but towards developing the qualities that the system of court life best rewarded, such as grace, nonchalance and flexibility. However empowering one's self-construction within these constraints may have been, the courtier was still the product of convention, manuals on court behaviour being essentially no different from handbooks for actors.²³ Nevertheless, the notion of self-consciousness (something often blending into self-interest), together with its strategic manipulations, was clearly in the ascendant, some people projecting their personality like a work of art and consequently inaugurating the specifically modern

¹⁹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self – The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 132–43.

²⁰ Robert P. Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 26–7.

²¹ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 85.

²² *Ibid.*, quoting from More's *Response to Luther* (1523), pp. 58–62.

²³ Valeria Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes – Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto* (Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 9–10.

connection between subjectivity and art. This is particularly evident with writers of autobiography who undertook the role of both subject and object in their writing. Meditation on the nature of the self is absolutely central to Shakespeare's sonnets and is also evident within the self-exploration encountered in his tragedies.²⁴

The focus on subjectivity was often accompanied by an awareness of both the anomalies in personal consciousness and the fact that one's personality could take on many shapes and sizes, even simultaneously. Nowhere is this more evident than in the *Essais* of Montaigne, written under the conditions of self-imposed isolation in the wake of deep personal trauma. What was so crucial about the turning point represented by Montaigne's thought was the fact that he set out with the traditional intention of discovering a 'true' self with a permanent unchanging core but found something quite different. His discovery of flux and impermanence, in the self as much as in the world, led him to develop the new imperative to find some degree of equilibrium within the patterns he had discovered in order to develop his own particular way of living within that flux.²⁵ In contradistinction to some of the forms of subjectivity that developed in the next century, Montaigne's meditations led not to an abstract and consistent self, universal for the human condition, but rather to one that was far more contingent and specific to each individual. His form of the self was one that was definitely recognizable, but this could only happen through representation (i.e. by being focused into an image or projection of some sort), one's sense of being both subject and object bringing the recognition that one never has control of the complete picture. There is no possibility of any self-knowledge independently of representation, as a form of interpretation dependent both on the position of the self as observer and on existing conventions.²⁶ As Christopher Braider has suggested, the type of self-representation that Montaigne was sensing shares something with Breugel's portrait of a painter, in which the rhetoric of perspective both enables the artist to depict a realistic self and also shapes the product through its own logic.²⁷ If Montaigne's knowledge of both the world and the self can only be tentative and

²⁴ See Brigitte Glaser, *The Creation of the Self in Autobiographical Forms of Writing in Seventeenth-century England – Subjectivity and Self-Fashioning in Memoirs, Diaries, and Letters* (Heidelberg, Germany: C. Winter, 2001), pp. 12–13, 43–4.

²⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 178–82.

²⁶ Dalia Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes: the Origins of Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 10–12, 110, 188.

²⁷ Christopher Braider, *Refiguring the Real – Picture and Modernity in Word and Image 1400–1700* (Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 87–8.

relativistic, there is a striking sense of openness, the potential for a limitless knowledge that expands just as soon as its current boundaries are defined.

It is precisely this consciousness of the productive illusion of representation that many of Shakespeare's plays develop. As Charles Whitney explains, audience response was 'productive, purposeful and performative, linking the world of the play to the world beyond and to the lives of the playgoers'. The plays tended to show the construction and disintegration of characters' identities, while the audiences were complicit in the types of illusion involved: '[The] complex theatricality . . . invites playgoers to participate in a play of resemblances between life and art involving eventually their own identities,' thus subverting our viewpoint and questioning our own identity.

The urgent meta-theatrical possibility broached by the motto traditionally ascribed to the Globe theatre . . . 'All the world plays the actor' is that characters, players and playgoers are all encompassed in one articulated theatrical continuum, not entirely divided into knower and known, and that life can be seen as a series of performances and improvisations.²⁸

While this loose, early-modern sense of subjectivity was never to disappear, the newer kinds to emerge in the seventeenth century were often designed to counteract the more sceptical, open, sense of subjectivity, by re-founding consciousness afresh. Descartes, in particular, saw his entire philosophical scheme as marking a new beginning, free from the errors caused by reliance on past authority (this sense of a fresh start – also shared by many religious reformers – is definitive of modernity, even if there can seldom be an entirely new beginning in practice).²⁹ The disciplined subjectivity is one that allows the individual more instrumental power to order both self and the world, and to achieve advances that the fluctuating forms of subjectivity of early (or pre-) modernity tended to obstruct. Descartes's first target in the pre-existing order is the tendency for people to see similarity in everything, every element resembling another, even if this was not always obvious to the naked eye (see p. 10). However, as Dalia Judovitz has observed, it is clear that both Descartes and Foucault tended to generalize from a very broad range of views; with Montaigne, for instance, resemblance was only one mode of knowledge out of several, and the 'newer' notion of representation was already central

²⁸ Charles Whitney, 'Ante-aesthetics: Towards a Theory of Early Modern Audience Response', in Grady, *Shakespeare and Modernity*, pp. 40–60, quotes from pp. 42, 47.

²⁹ Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 31.

to his mediated form of consciousness.³⁰ Moreover, the notion of total interconnectedness was clearly still alive and well in the eighteenth century, if the persistence of Leibniz's 'characteristica universalis' (and indeed his monadology) are anything to go by (see p. 149). Descartes's rejection of resemblance goes hand in hand with his opposition to trusting the evidence of experience, which is necessarily particular and contingent. His emphasis on mathematical reason means that things can be understood in relation to mathematical signs, uniform within their own symbolic order and detached from any assumed form of natural order. Signs based on the mathematical model can therefore communicate what they signify without necessarily resembling it; things are identified primarily by their difference, rather than resemblance, to each other. This move from an assumed similarity between all things in the 'chain of being' towards a system based more on identity and difference was also emerging in the thought of Francis Bacon in the early part of the seventeenth century.³¹

Given that reason remains identical to itself regardless of the objects reflected, Descartes can place reason as an intuition on a more secure basis than mere sensation (hitherto conflated with intuition in the scholastic tradition).³² From here it is a short step to make human reason identical with divine reason, so that, to a certain degree, man himself begins to occupy a position traditionally occupied by God. Like God, the human subject becomes disembodied, isolated and autonomous. Just as in fiction we can attribute to the material 'a nature in which there is absolutely nothing that everyone cannot know as perfectly as possible',³³ mankind can use the abstract tools of reason to create and understand the whole of reality itself. God remains as the guarantor of reason, the ultimate authority by which the human is not deceived in his creation of the world.

With his definition of the world as a necessary fiction (note the connection with the modern novel), Descartes later goes on to develop the subject itself as something whose truth is defined by its capacity to create its own conditions of existence through self-representation. This type of representation gains the character of a command, so that the fully developed Cartesian subject develops the power to project itself as a will

³⁰ Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes*, pp. 40–1.

³¹ Charles Whitney, *Francis Bacon and Modernity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 14–15, 70–5.

³² Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes*, p. 62.

³³ René Descartes, *Le Monde* (1629–33), chapter 6, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 90.

independent of the contingencies of reality.³⁴ Something analogous to this might be evident in Vermeer's *The Art of Painting*, in which the artist becomes neither a personified type or hero but, in the words of Christopher Braider, 'rather the pure, disembodied visual intelligence'. This disembodied subject, inferred through the technique of perspective, has the freedom not only to picture the world but also to include the represented artist within it. The separation of the self from the world is doubled by the separation of the viewing self from the represented self:

Just as Descartes distinguishes in the philosophical Ego between the *res cogitans* through which truths are perceived and known and the *res extensa* through which perceiving and knowing insert themselves in the empirical dimensions of time and place, so too Vermeer distinguishes between the painter as figure, appearing on the side of the image, and the active pictorial agency that is the image's source. The powers attributed to the painter in the painting relative to his muse revert in the end to Vermeer, but to Vermeer as perspective, pure constructive point of view.³⁵

Ironically, perhaps, Descartes explains the development of his ideas in the *Discourse* partly through autobiography, thus seeming to bring back the particular, contingent nature of human existence. His intention seems to be primarily didactic, since he presents himself as one example among many and behind which he as author lurks as a transcendental subject, guaranteeing the truth of his self-representation, just as God does for him. In this way, the autobiography permits Descartes to demonstrate both the general and the particular in the human subject. He becomes both the creator and the created, a subject sharing something of the human and the divine. While thinkers in the tradition of Montaigne saw themselves as part of an infinitely multiplying network of possible subjectivities, both within and outside oneself, Descartes attempted to make the conversations with the self a matter of an entirely self-contained nature.

In all, then, there is something profoundly artificial about the Cartesian project; it creates a necessarily fictional world as represented by the subject and, in turn, a necessarily fictionalized subject who enjoys total autonomy. Descartes's mathematized nature is no longer mimetic but is rather a model of how things ideally should be, a prescription rather than a description. Mathematized nature lays the groundwork for a human subject who can have a personality, individuality and will precisely as a function of the impersonal and total command of one's own representation.³⁶ The

³⁴ Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes*, pp. 92, 112 and 126–7.

³⁵ Braider, *Refiguring the Real*, p. 180.

³⁶ Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes*, pp. 191–3.

necessary artificiality notwithstanding, Descartes's system does tend to presume that the purest human intuitions point to a form of quasi-divine truth, guaranteed by a benevolent God. As the absolute self begins to subjugate nature, God is co-opted as the opposite pole to blind nature, a spiritual force that we possess to liberate ourselves from natural cycles.³⁷ This model and (more important) the systems of power and rationality of which it is a theorization were highly effective in organizing the world of early modernity.

Descartes tends to efface the physical and, particularly, the bodily aspects of the human condition. With Thomas Hobbes, approaching the problems of human subjectivity from precisely the opposite – materialist – side, the human being is essentially a product of physical processes. Significantly, though, his antidote to our natural propensity towards error involves a sense of necessary artificiality, equivalent in materialist terms to Descartes's necessary fictions of the idealist world and subject. For Hobbes it seems to be better to create and embrace an artificial construction knowingly and with a definite end in mind, than to assume a natural connection between human things and the rest of creation. From the outset of his *Leviathan*, Hobbes stresses that the 'art' of man consists in constructing artefacts in imitation of nature, which are in essence no different from the given automaton of the human body, as already created by God. The human creation of the state is but a further fabrication of this kind. If such a common power is not constructed, man reverts to a kind of war and famously experiences life as 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. In other words, man cannot assume that nature or providence will, left to its own devices, look after the human condition at all, or that the human mind is naturally in accord with reality.³⁸ It is not so much that there is brutish nature on the one hand and human civilization on the other, but that humans need to construct order out of the various conflicting natural orders at hand (which, unchecked, represent the condition of 'mere nature' in which all would recklessly pursue absolute liberty). Hobbes managed to put his finger on a specific ambiguity that might itself 'serve to define man', as Maurice Merleau-Ponty put it, by which everything 'is both manufactured and natural in man'.³⁹

³⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 177.

³⁸ Kraynak, *History and Modernity*, p. 107.

³⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (*Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, 1945), trans. Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 220. Merleau-Ponty goes on to suggest 'that there is not a word, not a form of [human] behaviour which does not owe something to purely biological being – and which at the same time does not elude the simplicity of animal life, and cause forms of vital behaviour to deviate from their pre-ordained

Hobbes's principal development of the older thinking of mankind as part of a broader chain of being is that the human must take a more active role in ordering nature and that the artificiality of the resulting structure is to be celebrated rather than condemned as unnatural. By manipulating his naturally mechanical givenness, the abstract mechanical man is a creative bridge between natural and artificial worlds.⁴⁰ The human is still driven by basic desires, but reason and disciplined thinking are to be employed 'as scouts and spies to range abroad and find the way to the things desired'.⁴¹ The ultimate objective, then, is to live well by balancing the natural mechanical elements with strategic projections of rationality, opening up the potential for a 'more deeply individuating kind of self-making'.⁴²

Hobbes also makes the distinction between the state of nature as something condemning humans to a life of continuous struggle and the ordering that comes with artifice: only with the latter are such things as industry, arts, letters or society possible.⁴³ From this point of view, then, the arts would seem to be the evidence of a successful development away from 'mere nature' rather than something linking us directly with natural order. The artificial is still to be seen as a more refined aspect of nature – but there is a sense (or at least a potential) in which it is not so far from being ultimately separable and independent from the received natural order, a 'second nature', as later philosophy might have called it. Human construction in the older sense served to deepen the nature already inherent in a thing – a vertical relation – while in the newer sense it seems to run parallel to nature, in a horizontal relation.

Just as with Descartes, anecdotal history and commonplace truths are to be mistrusted, and human subjects have to form themselves according to their own intentions and desires. The political corollary of this is the rise of the absolutist monarch in which the will of each individual subject is complicit. Bacon, writing specifically for a monarch who upheld the notion of divine right, sets out from a traditional theological context, yet he tends to promote the monarch as autonomous in self and action.⁴⁴

direction, through a sort of *leakage* and through a genius for ambiguity which might serve to define man.'

⁴⁰ Kraynak, *History and Modernity*, p. 166.

⁴¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or, Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil* (1651), edited by Nelle Fuller (Chicago, Auckland, London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2nd edn 1990), Part 1, chapter 8, p. 68.

⁴² Richard E. Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes: Skepticism, Individuality and Chastened Politics* (Newbury Park, Calif., and London: Sage, 1993), p. 79.

⁴³ Kraynak, *History and Modernity*, pp. 142–3.

⁴⁴ Whitney, *Francis Bacon and Modernity*, pp. 99–100.

According to Hobbes, the sovereign's power comes from the authorizing power of the subjects, a newly charged sense of authorship working hand in hand with a new sense of subjectivity and will, of which the sovereign is a representation. Political and social behaviour were no longer regulated by the assumption of a natural order, but more by the concept of an abstract, transcendental position of subjectivity emanating from the individual subject, below, rather than from divine authority, above. Each individual is the 'author' of the sovereign power (the 'feigned or artificial person' in the sense of he who represents 'the words or actions of another man').⁴⁵ While the 'author' is a real person, the sovereign representative is artificial, bound to the author as if his or her actions were done by the author personally. Consequently, obedience to the sovereign is equivalent to obeying oneself, and subjects likewise have obligations to one another as equals in their autonomy. Hobbes may well mark the beginning of a concept of relative subjectivity, which Habermas – its most devoted theorist – traces back to the early Hegel: a specifically modern form of subjectivity that inheres in the mediation between subjects rather than in the more rigid autonomy of the individual sovereign subject reflecting on the surrounding objects.⁴⁶ In the context of art, the development of a subjectivity effected in communication and mediation would suggest that the concept of individual authorship is dependent on the collective will (or at least the consensus) of those who receive the work composed. A stronger Baroque concept of the musical work would therefore correspond to a stronger concept of the creating composer, which, in turn, coincides both with the rise of absolutism and with the crucial authorizing role of each individual subject.

Descartes and Hobbes tend to conceive of the absolute monarch from opposite sides: the former would see the sovereign as an absolute subject conditioning the possibility of his subjects while the latter would see the absolute monarch as a projection of those very subjects (as real material beings in themselves). Hobbes never proposes an innate superiority of monarch to subjects; these latter rather submit to an 'artificial' person defined by office in order to avoid the inevitable conflict of freedoms between subjects. This agreement to delegate whatever authority and autonomy the individual might have serves the purpose of equality, although, as some have pointedly averred, this might as well be defined as the equality of the dungeon.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part 1, chapter 16, p. 96.

⁴⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity – Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1987), pp. 30–1.

⁴⁷ Flathman, *Thomas Hobbes*, pp. 96–7.

Descartes learned much from his early experience in the army, the organization of which influenced both the state apparatus and business, with its modern administrative power. Much of the success of the army lay in the sort of division of labour that Maurice of Nassau outlined, each soldier drilled to perform a specific role, so that each individual contributed to the co-ordinated movements of the group as a whole.⁴⁸ This notion of separating elements in order to achieve greater power for the whole, is one of the essential developments of modernity, one that represented the downside of the type of autonomy that was beginning to emerge in the seventeenth century. Each step towards greater individualization and greater autonomous fulfilment also brought with it the sense of increasing separation and alienation.

Towards a view of Bach's subjectivity

Much about Bach's known life implies that his worldview and attitudes were primarily those of a pre-modern. His few statements on music suggest that he saw it as of a piece with natural order and that good, devotional music is specifically ordained by biblical authority and draws us into God's presence.⁴⁹ Thus the traditional, Pythagorean, conception of music as something essentially connected to the proportions of creation is alloyed with Luther's view of music as a supreme gift from God. Bach's upbringing was clearly along the lines of a traditional craftsman, one who excelled upon the familial career path but who showed virtually no inclination to break away from this and strike out on new, international musical enterprises, as Handel most famously did.

There is really only one source that gives us any sense of Bach's most intimate and personal thoughts, namely the three-volume Luther Bible, published with extensive commentary (largely excerpts from Luther's writings) by Abraham Calov in 1681 and acquired by Bach in 1733. This contains a large number of annotations, most of which are almost

⁴⁸ Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, vol. 2: *The Nation-State and Violence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 113–15.

See also Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, pp. 87–8.

⁴⁹ See Howard H. Cox (ed.), *The Calov Bible of J. S. Bach* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1985), facsimile 112, p. 419, where Bach wrote 'NB Bey einer andächtigen Musig [sic] ist allezeit Gott mit seiner Gnaden-Gegenwart' ('NB with a devotional music God is always present with His grace'). For Bach's attitude to thoroughbass as the foundation of music, see *Dok 2*, p. 334, and the new annotated translation, by Pamela L. Poulin, *J. S. Bach – Precepts and Principles for Playing the Thorough-Bass or Accompanying in Four Parts* (Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 10–11.

certainly in Bach's hand, involving the highlighting of portions of text with strokes in the margins, underlinings or other notations, corrections and a few added comments. These annotations have often been used as ammunition against those who doubt Bach's piety and also to demonstrate Bach's deep knowledge of the Bible – at least deep enough to correct misprints and omissions (and even to point out apparent contradictions in matters of the Law).⁵⁰ However, Bach's markings also give a remarkably clear sense of some of his subjective inclinations since there are obvious patterns emerging from the passages he highlights.

Given that so much of this text derives from Luther himself (and that Bach also owned sets of Luther's complete works, now lost), Bach was evidently deeply – and apparently uncritically – immersed in a mindset that was at least two hundred years old. If his highlighting of certain texts indicates approval, as on the whole it surely must, much of Bach's mentality and view of the world was archaic by the standards of the early Enlightenment, even if his outlook was shared by many in his orthodox Lutheran locality. Luther follows the scholastic opinion that Adam's righteousness was not in his nature, but was rather an adornment with which he was embellished, just as the garland on a beautiful maiden is something distinct from her nature. To this Bach adds, 'which comes to her externally and without violation of nature'. The text continues to affirm that such things can be taken away as well as given, so that even man and the Devil himself, who have both lost their righteousness, still retain the natural powers with which they were initially endowed.⁵¹ That Bach seems to have assimilated this argument suggests he held a fundamentally pre-modern view of the human subject as fundamentally inert, natural and spiritual matter, and that morality or righteousness, together with their opposites, are essentially embellishments rather than constitutive of the people concerned.

In this light, it is perhaps not surprising to find Bach underlining several passages that point to a degree of moral passivity in the way we should deal with the world. Most striking are the comments about 'how a heart is not at all in control of itself and its thoughts' and that even those who seek to murder Jesus are powerless if God has not set the hour for them to do so. Given that 'the book and register of our lives is already written and closed in God' we should not let our thoughts range too widely or aim

⁵⁰ See Robin A. Leaver, *J. S. Bach and Scripture: Glosses from the Calov Bible Commentary* (St Louis: Concordia, 1986).

⁵¹ Cox, *The Calov Bible*, facsimile 10, p. 398.

higher than what God has ordained for us. Indeed, we should follow the evil thoughts of reason as little as we follow the inclinations of our flesh.⁵²

In our general life we should surrender ourselves to Christ in every matter, accepting our lot, and not become too irritated if, having more intelligence and wisdom than most, we are vexed by all that is wrong with the world. We should simply repeat to ourselves 'Thy will be done', since otherwise by irritating ourselves needlessly we 'waste time and other precious things'. Humans can do very little to improve the world, and there will always be infirmity and failure, so while one should not ignore matters of justice and order, one should also not aim to make everything absolutely perfect, and should rather steer a middle course. Sometimes it is even best to let fools go their own way since strident opposition could make matters worse.⁵³

Lest it be inferred that Bach has an entirely neutral attitude to everything that happened to him and others in life, there is clearly one area which is unequivocally the focal point of his being, namely his office and station in life. One of the greatest expanses in his annotations relates to the Book of Wisdom, beginning with Calov's summary of the main point of the book (annotated as 'Summa Libri' by Bach): that there is no greater wisdom than to do one's duty; that one should not be fearful if things do not go the way we desire, nor fear for the future, but dedicate oneself to the office and work that God has ordained. Bach highlights passages from Luther stating that one should not be guilty of thwarting anyone in their handicraft; that he who contributes well to church affairs is likely to find people growing weary of his fine example; that one should do what is commanded by one's position, regardless of what others do or say, dedicating its course and result to God.⁵⁴

It is difficult to conceive of a more conservative agenda than one that tells us we should stick absolutely to the station that God has given us and that it is foolish to presume ourselves as being capable of a different role, like the common man who has ambitions to be a ruler. Luther tells us that God will punish us if we use our possessions and gifts badly, so it is not surprising that we are allowed – indeed exhorted – to express anger for the sake of our office. Never should one show anger for one's own sake 'no matter how severe the offence has been', but even small slights to one's

⁵² *Ibid.*, facsimile 247, p. 448; facsimile 162, p. 430; facsimile 159, p. 428.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, facsimile 73, p. 412; facsimile 144, p. 424 (quote); facsimiles 166–7, pp. 432–3; facsimile 171, p. 434; facsimile 176, p. 436.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, facsimile 86, p. 414; facsimile 141, p. 423; facsimile 159, p. 428; facsimile 165, p. 431; facsimile 181, p. 438.

office are worthy of rebuke.⁵⁵ Much in these latter comments strongly resonates with what we know of Bach's own experiences throughout his employed life, particularly in Leipzig where his authority in musical matters was continually being challenged or eroded.

What is emerging here is the sense of intense dedication to one's own vocation, something that gains extra emphasis with Bach's enthusiastic annotation of the various passages relating to the biblical foundation of music (see p. 52).⁵⁶ One could almost infer that he studied this commentary specifically to find biblical justification both for his career and for the art of music. It was only in music that Bach considered himself to have any influence on the world since this was the station specifically ordained for him by God, one that it was his duty to develop as far as it would go, with no regard whatever to the various forms of opposition he was to encounter.

The notion of absolute station is also closely related to Bach's highlighting of matters to do with kingship: the king is placed above all in order to supervise farming and also to protect his subjects from all kinds of assault. Such status, like that of the musician, is ordained by God and likewise brings its own tasks.⁵⁷ Rulers, like heads of households, are to put up patiently with those for whom they are responsible, and parents must realize that their care for their children in body and soul puts them essentially in God's position, punishing children like a judge, teaching them like a doctor, and preaching like a pastor.⁵⁸ We might infer, then, that the monarch runs his kingdom as a microcosm of God's kingship over creation, and that the family unit duplicates this on the next level down. While much of this may have seemed superficially similar to the new type of absolutism developed by Louis XIV and – closer to Bach's environment – in Saxony and Prussia, pre-modern kingship rested on the essentially sacred status of the monarch's person, integrated into the seamless order and unity that lay behind all creation. With this almost sacramental role for monarchy, the diffuse forms of political power would pledge their loyalty to the monarch, but the latter's ambitions were limited by reciprocal duties towards the customary rights and privileges of subjects and the network of the Estates.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, facsimiles 161–2, p. 429; facsimile 203, p. 442; facsimile 218, p. 445 (quote).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, facsimiles 110–12, pp. 418–19.

⁵⁷ For an excellent study of the fixed orders prevalent in pre-modernity, see Harvie Ferguson, *Modernity and Subjectivity – Body, Soul, Spirit* (Charlottesville and London: Virginia University Press, 2000), esp. pp. 30–2.

⁵⁸ Cox, *The Calov Bible*, facsimile 44, p. 405; facsimile 159, p. 429; facsimile 167, p. 433.

⁵⁹ See Richard L. Gawthrop, *Pietism and the Making of Eighteenth-century Prussia* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 85.

It is easy to conclude at this point that Bach's mentality was that of a typical pre-modern subject, or at least one who showed the early modern Protestant tendency to define oneself through a direct relationship with Christ through faith, and developing a sense of personhood through a studied negation of one's powers rather than through a sense of individual autonomy. Perhaps Bach lived in his own age in a way that was entirely oblivious to the scientific revolution or to the various stronger concepts of subjectivity that had developed since the sixteenth century. Yet it is surely simplistic to believe he was unaffected by the newer developments of his age – after all, his music sounds very different from that of Johann Walter or Ludwig Senfl, or even Josquin Desprez, the composer whom Luther himself so much admired. Bach was perfectly happy to absorb many of the most modern musical developments, if often in surprising and unexpected ways. The notion that he held such orthodox Lutheran views in an age of Enlightenment renders them essentially different from what they could have been in the sixteenth century (just as Borges's Pierre Menard creates a *Don Quixote* in the twentieth century entirely different from Cervantes' characters, even though he produces exactly the same words).

While the Calov Bible seems to present us with telling evidence of Bach's subjective position, our reading might well be different if other annotated volumes in Bach's library (both musical and theological) were to have survived. He seems to have collected texts representing the full range of Lutheran factionalism including many of a more obviously 'modern' mindset. He may even have been aware that Calov's approach was not merely an innocent appropriation of Luther's writings, oblivious to the current climate. Calov was writing after a time of great trauma in the seventeenth century, namely the Thirty Years' War, which was also a period of great diffusion of prophetic, apocalyptic voices within Lutheranism. The type of rigid hierarchy emphasized by the commentary was something to be rearticulated specifically to reinforce order within a diffuse church, a sort of 'restoration' of many of the original Lutheran values.

However, this traditionalism was paralleled by the growth of a more introspective, subjective focus, most significantly demonstrated in the early seventeenth-century writings of Johann Arndt. Not only did these also appear in Bach's library but they were also of signal influence on the spiritual stance of Heinrich Müller.⁶⁰ Müller's writings (also in Bach's library) are highly significant because some of his sermons provided much of the material that Picander used to construct the text of the Matthew

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 93–4, 98 (n. 69).

Passion.⁶¹ Although grounded in the traditional Lutheran view of faith leading to a mystical union with God, Arndt's emphasis on love and the concept of 'rebirth' effected a fundamental shift in mainstream Lutheranism.⁶² This encouraged people to remake themselves and also engage in works of charity, and draw closer to a works-oriented confession-alism (so modifying Luther's central concept of justification by faith alone).

This greater sense of subjective identity retained much from considerably earlier forms of mystical piety. From this point of view, it was something entirely different from the human-centred subjectivism that Descartes was developing. Indeed, Arndt's intention seems to have been to reaffirm the way the human and the divine interconnected, the way the believer was to experience God at the centre of his being. Nevertheless, this reaffirmation of active subjectivity was soon to shift towards a self-analytical inwardness, influenced by English Puritanism, one that cultivated a more independent form of subjectivity.⁶³

The movement towards a more modern sense of subjectivity was evident throughout Lutheranism, but one faction developed into perhaps the most significant threat to Lutheran unity so far, the Pietist movement instigated by Philipp Jakob Spener during the 1670s in Frankfurt. This began with the intentions of cultivating a natural continuation and completion of the Lutheran Reformation. It worked towards the development of a greater personal piety, although its works-oriented justification took Arndt's modifications a stage further. Contrary to the impression we might gain from Calov's commentary (its publication coinciding with the early flowering of Pietist reform), Spener and his followers believed they could make material improvements in the world, particularly with the provision of poor relief in the form of orphanages and workhouses to provide skills and training; these soon spread to many major German cities. In this manner, any residual feelings of apocalyptic imminence left over from the traumas of the Thirty Years' War were redirected towards a regeneration of the church in the present and the sense that a 'limited perfection' was within reach on earth itself.⁶⁴

Perhaps the most significant mechanism for cultivating a more disciplined sense of subjectivity was the establishment of small cells for worship

⁶¹ Axmacher, 'Eine Quellenfund zum Text der Matthäus-Passion'.

⁶² Gawthrop, *Pietism*, p. 96.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100. For parallels with English Puritanism, see Mary Fulbrook, *Piety and Politics – Religion and the Rise of Absolutism in England, Württemberg and Prussia* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁶⁴ Gawthrop, *Pietism*, pp. 108, 114–15.

and meditation, the conventicles or collegia. With these came the inauguration of the essentially modern concept of being 'born again', something associated with Spener's most significant (if more fanatical) follower, August Hermann Francke, who went through a personal conversion process in 1687. As Francke came to dominate the entire educational and religious establishment of Halle in the first decades of the eighteenth century, he placed psychological pressure on all children to renounce their old selves, gently but insistently breaking each child's 'natural will' in order to prepare for the expected conversion. It was a similar, born-again, experience that the crown prince of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm, underwent in his twentieth year, one that eventually made him so sympathetic to the Pietist cause throughout his state.⁶⁵

Not only was the demand for refashioning implemented from above, but students were made to examine and discipline themselves with diaries and self-evaluation (and indeed to report on the moral weaknesses of their fellows). Francke's conception of a child's anarchic 'natural will' is telling, particularly if combined with his obvious obsession with conversion, suggesting that there came with this a fear of uncontrollable natural urges and loss of faith. This sense of continuous defence against doubt lay behind the values of discipline and obedience that were to become so central to Friedrich Wilhelm's Prussia. In all, this suggests that Pietism – unwittingly perhaps – embraced something of the notion of necessary artificiality that was essential to both Descartes and Hobbes, the view that 'mere nature' would by no means return mankind to a natural, spiritual unity with God. The battle with doubt and the sense of sudden conversion mirrors much in Descartes's autobiographical account of his own development, a sense of individuality most strongly derived from a negation of given assumptions of connectedness. Pietism was also progressive in its tendency to encourage its adherents to cross established social or gender boundaries, embracing an egalitarianism that was sometimes considered dangerous by the political authorities.⁶⁶

Bach's relation to Pietism has been a matter of protracted speculation. He could not have shared the fundamental practices of mainstream Pietism on account of its antipathy towards the arts and particularly towards complex music, which were considered to divert the believer from the firm control of one's being. Bach's departure from Mühlhausen seems to have been precipitated by the Pietist leanings of the clergy, and he

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 156, 167–8, 205.

⁶⁶ Tanya Kevorkian, *Baroque Piety: Religion, Society, and Music in Leipzig, 1650–1750* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 149–50, 156, 160–4.

would surely have heard of the most infamous period of unrest caused by Pietists, in Leipzig itself, in 1689–90. Francke's lectures at the university (while still a student) had instigated a religious revival that spread from university to town, leading to uncontrolled expressions of 'enthusiasm' and then to the suppression of Pietism throughout Saxony.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Pietism thrived in nearby Halle, under Prussian rule, where the new university evolved as a Pietist counterbalance to that of Leipzig. Halle Pietism was groundbreaking in its educational depth and efficiency, its missionary zeal having strong effects well beyond the home state. Seen in this way, Pietism was no longer simply an anti-Enlightenment force, as its proponents might have imagined, but part of the bedrock of developed subjectivism on which the Enlightenment itself was built. Indeed, its disciplined inwardness took it out of the realm of received dogmatics, rendering it 'autonomous in the choice of heteronomy'.⁶⁸

There is an increasing consensus that some of the texts Bach used and musical styles he adopted show parallels with Pietism. It may be that such features would have developed anyway, within the mainstream of Orthodox Lutheranism; or perhaps they were introduced as a way of neutralizing some of Pietism's more disruptive forces by appropriating some of its popular developments. The overt emotionalism and the profiling of the individual in Picander's Matthew Passion text certainly share something with Pietist poetry, even if the text remains resolutely Orthodox in its overall stance.⁶⁹ Indeed, the way the poetic text initially works to break down the will of the believer with a sense of overwhelming guilt, thereafter building up the believer's strength in Christ, is very much of a piece with Pietist practices and shows a subtlety of psychological manipulation similar to that of Francke's sermons. Much of this meditative structure might well derive from Luther's own meditations on the Passion,⁷⁰ but it was a structure that had been brought up to date by Francke's potent methods. Another – perhaps unintended – consequence of the movement was the tendency to make man's relationship with Jesus overshadow his relationship with God: Bach's Matthew Passion is clearly concerned with the fate of Jesus and the 'timetabled' revelation of his divinity, God playing a relatively passive, if not absent, role in the work as

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 147–67; Gawthrop, *Pietism*, pp. 117–18.

⁶⁸ Gawthrop, *Pietism*, pp. 275–7, 280; the quotation is from Adorno, 'Bach Defended', p. 136.

⁶⁹ See Axmacher, 'Aus Liebe will mein Heyland sterben', pp. 216–18. See also Martin Geck, 'Bach und der Pietismus', in 'Denn alles findet bei Bach statt' – *Erforschtes und Erfahrenes* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2000), pp. 68–108.

⁷⁰ Chafe, *Tonal Allegory*, pp. 337–47.

a whole. Bach's Passion music, and particularly that for Matthew, provides evidence that Bach was aware of the basic turn towards the disciplined, but enhanced, individuality that was central to incipient modernity. Moreover, it could be argued that the more Bach's music stirs and moves us, effecting a change of emotional state, the more it corresponds to a Pietist conception of religious experience rather than to a more Orthodox, theologically based one. But perhaps the Pietist antipathy towards complex music lay precisely in the fact that music achieved the aims of emotional change all too well, only then to leave the listener stranded in a vulnerable state that – given the ineffable nature of music in general – could be attached to contents and meanings well beyond the religious purpose.

Pietism relates to another aspect of life that Bach would have experienced in the early eighteenth century, namely its influence on the development of a newer form of absolutism. Friedrich Wilhelm, who ascended the Prussian throne in 1713, soon adopted the Halle Pietists' forms of education, conversion and personal control as the model for the entire state, combining their disciplined religiosity with his unadulterated militarism. Personal control and discipline therefore became essential in the establishment of the most successful absolutist state so far, one that far exceeded Louis XIV's France in terms of efficiency and centralized power. Friedrich Wilhelm's form of monarchy and statehood was projected as an abstract entity beyond the person of the monarch himself. The state gained a particular efficiency from its sense of transcendent identity, freed from the traditional mutual obligations between a feudal monarch and his Estates and the semiautonomous guilds and traditions crisscrossing the country. This modern absolutist state also inaugurated a degree of meritocracy and a bureaucratic enhancement of worker motivation and performance evaluation.

In all, then, the effectiveness of Pietism as a form of discipline and also as a tool of political organization would have been obvious in Bach's Saxony, even if many Lutherans there did not follow Pietist religious practice. Moreover, since Pietism tended to eschew complex theological standpoints, with its emphasis on the immediate experience of the individual unsullied by quasi-scholastic church dogma, it tended to promote a sense of ecumenicism that was highly unusual at the time. Friedrich Wilhelm was, in fact, a Calvinist by upbringing and education, and, although he never succeeded in uniting the Lutheran and Reformed confessions in Prussia, his state provided a potent model for co-operation between confessions. In Saxony there was a parallel situation in which the Elector was a Catholic while most of the population remained Lutheran.

If the absolutism of both Friedrich August I and II of Saxony did not produce such a powerful state as Friedrich Wilhelm's (and later Friedrich II's) Prussia, it achieved much in terms of centralization and international prominence, together with the expansion of Dresden as the most significant cultural capital of its age.

Bach's absorption of the instrumental advantages of modern absolutism has been outlined by Ulrich Siegele's searching study of the composer's political allegiances.⁷¹ The majority of Bach's posts before Leipzig were associated with princely courts rather than towns, and his position in Leipzig was supported by the absolutist faction on the town council. Repeatedly he took his grievances to the Elector of Saxony in Dresden (ignoring the obvious difference in their religious affiliations); he was keen to gain status, even a post at the court. Bach's compositions for the Dresden court, most famously the Kyrie and Gloria of what eventually became the Mass in B Minor (but also numerous cantatas in homage to the royal family) suggest the express intention of 'authorizing' absolutism (parallel to the sense conceived by Hobbes). This brings with it the double intensification of the concept of 'subject', as someone in a subservient position but also as someone who contributes to the artificial intensification of a supreme subject (and of his or her own subjectivity as 'author').

Siegele shows that Bach also adhered to some of the principles of organization that came with absolutism: the desire for a 'well-regulated' church music which he voiced in Mühlhausen in 1708 and Leipzig in 1730 betrays the terminology of the organized standing army, so central to the development of rationalist political order in the seventeenth century and soon to become key to the identity of nearby Prussia. Bach's envy of the way musicians at the Saxon court in Dresden were encouraged to concentrate on a single instrument suggests an appreciation of the division of labour characteristic of both military discipline and early industrialization.⁷² In 1731 the Prussian government succeeded in lobbying the Imperial diet to force all guilds within the Holy Roman Empire to acquire new privileges from the princes of their individual territories, placing these traditional groupings more directly under centralized royal control.⁷³

⁷¹ Ulrich Siegele, 'Bach and the Domestic Politics of Electoral Saxony', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 17–34. See also Siegele, 'Bachs politisches Profil', in Konrad Küster (ed.), *Bach Handbuch* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1999), pp. 5–30.

⁷² See Bach's 'Short but most necessary draft for a well-appointed Church Music' ('Entwurf'), in *NBR*, p. 150; *Dok* 1, p. 63.

⁷³ Gawthrop, *Pietism*, p. 258.

The late feudal concept of the monarch mirroring the role of God and dividing lands and overseeing his subjects, duplicated at the family level, and expressed in Bach's orthodox Lutheran reading in Calov's Bible, may steadily have slid into the more modern conception of absolutism. The difference, to which Bach was possibly oblivious, would have been the strict rationalization of absolutist order (with everyone indeed still 'in their own station'), dictated by an artificial system that was continually subject to changing circumstances and policies. The strengthening of family unity that developed in tandem with absolutism also builds nicely on the traditional Lutheran conception of the family as a microcosm of God's order. Although the Bach family enjoyed several generations of seemingly exclusive musical employment, it was Sebastian who seemed the most concerned with constructing a family tree and amassing an archive of music from the older generations. He seems to have taken his post as family patriarch extremely seriously, not just in the intensive musical training of his sons but also in the way he engaged many members of the family in his own musical productions as both performers and copyists.

This familial activity may well have had a role in Bach's development as arguably the first major pedagogue of musical composition (rather than merely of compositional method or abstract counterpoint). While he would have been brought up in the traditional training in counterpoint, thoroughbass and imitation of models, what is known of his teaching methodology, and the evidence of numerous musical pieces designed for teaching, implies an approach geared towards the practicalities of actual composition. His son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, claimed that, as a teacher, Sebastian avoided the abstract contrapuntal exercises of the Fux school and focused on what was directly applicable to contemporary practice and the construction of actual pieces of music.⁷⁴ Perhaps Bach participated in the mindset that Walter Benjamin saw as essential for the creators of German tragic drama in the early modern age: given that God saw that his creation was good, evil must reside in that which has no object, and therefore relate to abstract contemplation and the quest for knowledge for its own sake. Good becomes a sort of secondary knowledge, emerging

⁷⁴ NBR, p. 399, Dok 3, no. 803. Bach studied older forms of counterpoint himself, particularly during the Leipzig years, as is shown in Christoph Wolff's pioneering study *Der Stile antico in der Musik Johann Sebastian Bachs – Studien zu Bachs Spätwerk* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1968). This has been greatly amplified by recent discoveries by Wolff and others, who have had access to new Bach sources in archives that were hitherto unexplored. See note 108 on p. 94.

from actual practice and distanced from contemplation.⁷⁵ In the tendency to hone education towards the immediate needs and practicalities of the age, Bach was achieving in compositional training precisely what Halle Pietism was doing for general education, where direct vocational training compensated in depth for what it lacked in the breadth of abstract, theoretical material.⁷⁶ The fact that so many of Bach's pupils wrote major Enlightenment treatises on compositional practice (e.g. C. P. E. Bach, Marpurg, Kirnberger) suggests that they were continuing a process of rationalization of musical creativity, as a vocation in its own right, that was instigated by their teacher.

If in one sense Bach seems to have denied any notion of individuality or originality in terms of his personal identity, his dedication to his office as musician was clearly more striking than that of virtually any musician before him. It is as if something of the intensification of the individual theorized by Descartes or disciplined by Francke were focused entirely into the realm of music. Music became not just the central practice of faith but acquired something of the works-based ethos developing within certain strands of modern Lutheranism. With Bach, there is not even the sense of strategic refashioning or ambiguous subjectivity that developed in the era of Shakespeare and Montaigne; his identity as musician is simply unwavering, the object of his personality and thus the locus of his most intensive subjective presence.

Many of these more 'modern' impulses in Bach's development of his God-given vocation suggest some sense of the necessary artificiality that was so much at the forefront of seventeenth-century progressive thought. Advances in the human condition could only be made if the unquestioned link with an assumed natural order were broken, or at least challenged. The traditional Lutheran view of the world as fundamentally flawed could be modified with the sense that one could improve upon nature in the areas in which one was divinely licensed to practise. However much Bach may have believed in the natural order to which harmony pointed, his music contains a level of constructedness that is unparalleled for its time. Indeed, Bach's music was branded 'unnatural' by Johann Adolph Scheibe in 1737, while Bach's champion in the dispute, Johann Abraham Birnbaum, stressed that, rather than spoiling something that was there already, the composer instead used art to improve on the

⁷⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 1963), trans. John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 233.

⁷⁶ Gawthrop, *Pietism*, pp. 160–1.

imperfections of nature.⁷⁷ The question also arises as to whether Bach/Birnbaum approached the more modern 'horizontal' sense of the artificial, something that had the potential to substitute for a nature that was no longer necessarily reliable, running parallel to what remained of natural order. Bach may well have been articulating musically something close to the Hobbesian concept of tempering 'mere nature' with a form of necessary artificiality.

The Scheibe dispute throws into relief the way several conceptions of modernity could clash with one another in the early Enlightenment era.⁷⁸ Scheibe was the purveyor of the fashionable view that music came closest to nature when it was clear and simple, melody-based, and, above all, supportive of text. To him, Bach's music was confusing and incoherent, old-fashioned in mimicking the complexities of an imaginary natural order rather than conveying the only 'natural' form of human expression, speech. Nature had been redefined as that which was readable in human terms, apparently clear and direct. Although Bach's basic standpoint was indeed archaic, his sense of 'improving' nature in fact represented a different aspect of modernity, one that owes its lineage to Renaissance Neo-Platonism. Such an approach can be seen in Roger de Piles' advice to the visual artist (c. 1699): skilful painters imitate nature by going beyond visible nature, reproducing her in amended forms. One learns to make a good choice from Nature, adopting the beautiful and rectifying the deficiencies. Piles suggests that art is superior to nature by imitating her intention of production rather than the imperfect products themselves; her intention is always to create 'a perfect work'.⁷⁹ In all, then, individual works of art surpass particular productions of nature, although they are beneath nature when viewed in her entirety. What one has to do is not merely understand the natural hierarchy of nature but take an active role in furthering the providential design, in other words, intuit some of the purposes of God himself. This sort of art is no longer merely the traditional 'imitation of nature' (*mimesis* – or *natura naturata*, nature as created) but involves rather imitating 'the author of nature' (*natura naturans*, nature in the process of creation). It may well be, then, that Bach's apparent backwardness was actually

⁷⁷ The dispute is documented in *NBR*, pp. 337–53; *Dok* 2, nos. 400, 409, 413, 420, 436, 442, 552. For Birnbaum's comments on art improving nature, see *NBR*, p. 345.

⁷⁸ See Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 219–24.

⁷⁹ Braider, *Refiguring the Real*, pp. 158–9.

something that helped to inaugurate a new concept of the composer, as someone who created original things that do not directly imitate those that are phenomenally pre-existing.⁸⁰

In this sense, then, art has the role of redeeming an increasingly uncertain natural world, producing a better version of the same, which – while patently artificial – points through its transformative power towards a more perfect and fulfilled world in which human life expresses the intention of reaching a new, redemptive order.⁸¹ In Bach's case, the traditional Lutheran impetus to endure the imperfections of the world through faith and concentration on a specific task is – perhaps unintentionally – fused with this more modern view of a better form of existence (whether in heaven, as Bach surely believed, or in the optimistic projections of the modern world). Scheibe's view was perhaps more conditioned by a degree of complacency in the newly found Enlightenment order, a world in which man's understanding and control of nature seemed all but complete. He seems to epitomize what Adorno and Horkheimer term the 'bourgeois ideal of naturalness' which steers for a virtuous mean between identical but opposite dangers – raw nature and total artifice – in order to guarantee its own security. Moreover, Scheibe's fealty towards 'the natural' demonstrates precisely how the Enlightenment itself reverts to mythology.⁸²

Authorizing Jesus

There is no certain way of defining Bach's political mindset, but it is clear that circumstances compelled him towards reliance on the patronage of the Saxon Elector during his Leipzig years. Whether he wanted to or not, the music he wrote and performed for courts throughout his career helped to 'authorize' the power of the princes concerned, particularly those of Saxony. These latter, in turn, could give him support in his vocational mission in Leipzig, enhancing his own status as a reflection of royal (and, from the point of view of his appointed vocation, divine) power. The fact that much of the music he wrote for the Saxon royal family was soon adapted to sacred use by substituting a new text shows that his musical 'authorization' of royalty could equally be turned to Jesus himself, particularly in a work like the *Christmas Oratorio* that celebrates

⁸⁰ See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 377. ⁸¹ Braider, *Refiguring the Real*, p. 160.

⁸² Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 31.

his birth. Perhaps, then, the two Passion settings might similarly involve constructions of Jesus at the time of his death.

Elke Axmacher notes a significant change in Lutheran atonement theology during Bach's lifetime, from the traditional 'satisfaction' theory, by which Jesus' sacrifice pays the impossibly high price exacted by God for human sin, to a conception based much more on Jesus as the model of the ideal human, with God increasingly sidelined – a move very much of a piece with the early Enlightenment (and indeed Pietism). She shows how the poetic texts interleaved with the Gospel narrative in Bach's two Passions conform with this trajectory, especially in the case of the Matthew Passion.⁸³ The John Passion text of 1724 (associated with the Gospel that Luther himself most highly favoured) retains something of the orthodox conception, albeit lacking many references to God's judgment, punishment and anger. Christ's ultimate victory is celebrated from the first words of the opening chorus, his function as the one and only means to salvation is stressed by one of the central texts, sung to a chorale melody (22, 'Durch dein Gefängnis', 'Through your captivity must our freedom come'), and the dramatic argumentation of the Gospel narrative relates much more to the establishment of Jesus' identity than to his suffering as a human being. In Matthew's Gospel we are faced with a much more intensely human figure of Jesus than John's, one whose divine nature is revealed progressively, building to the climax of the centurion's utterance 'Wahrlich' ('Truly this was the son of God', 63b), joined by the bystanders and sung by the entire complement of singers.

Part of the musical effect of the John Passion, from its opening, is the sense of Christ's continuous and ineradicable presence – he really is the Alpha and Omega of the whole event, supremely confident beside the very human squabbling that makes this piece so dramatic. The music of the first chorus tends to imply this sense of immanence, by which virtually every gesture is interconnected and ultimately traceable to the opening ritornello. Every element of the opening hierarchy of figures and rhythms can appear in other positions, some in diminished or augmented form. It is difficult to conceive of music that could be more oriented to the notion of an interconnected chain of being, ideal for supporting a text that refers to Christ's glory celebrated in all lands throughout all times (the tortuous pathos of the harmonic language notwithstanding).

The opening chorus of the Matthew Passion strikes a different tone: the question-and-answer dialogue that breaks out after the fugally based

⁸³ Axmacher, 'Aus Liebe will mein Heyland sterben', esp. pp. 149–203.

opening is entirely unexpected, as is the introduction of the chorale 'O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig', which is resolutely in G major, the relative major of the tonic of E minor. Although Bach typically rounds off the movement by bringing back a modified da capo of the opening material, this is very different from the literal da capo of the John Passion's opening chorus. Moreover, both the bar form of the chorale and its G major tonality cut across any roundedness in the structure. If the initial impression of the John Passion is of immanent, self-referential musical substance, evoking a seamless continuity with all times and places (a paradigmatic conception, perhaps), the Matthew Passion points to potentially heterogeneous materials that are artificially held together in a chain by a skilful manipulation of form (thus more a syntagmatic conception).⁸⁴ Moreover, even to those familiar with the allegorical tradition lying behind Picander's text (with its references backwards to the Song of Songs and forwards to Revelation), it is considerably more ambiguous than the John Passion text, many of its expressions only retrospectively to be recognized as keywords for later arias. In short, at every level, the opening of the Matthew Passion points beyond itself, its unity and apparent autonomy seeming contrived and provisional. Here we may expect Jesus to be a figure who emerges and develops, a human son of God whose divinity is to be revealed specifically as a result of the events narrated.

What musical methods does Bach adopt to represent Jesus in the Passions, and is there any difference between this representation in the two settings? The narrative of the John Passion begins with the dramatic scene of Jesus' arrest in the garden (the recitative 2a); his first statement is the simple question 'Whom seek ye?' ('Wen suchet ihr?') addressed to the chief priests' and Pharisees' servants. This rising major sixth could be considered a surprising gesture, at least within seventeenth-century compositional theory (some writers associated such leaps with the rhetorical figure 'Exclamatio').⁸⁵ On the other hand, closer examination of the recitative leading up to this question shows that the Evangelist's melodic line is suffused with rising and falling sixths (major and minor), beginning in b. 3, then bb. 5–6, 6–7, 10, 12, 13, 15–16 (Example 1.1).

⁸⁴ In seeing this chorus as more linear (and 'chain-like') than the norm for Bach's da capo forms, my approach clearly differs from Karol Berger's (*Bach's Cycle*, pp. 45–59), which suggests rather that the sequential is subordinated to the cyclic in this movement.

⁸⁵ For a historical description, see Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica – Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* (Lincoln, Nebr. and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 265–9; J. G. Walter (*Lexicon*, Leipzig, 1732) specifically related it to the minor sixth.

Evangelist

Tenor

Je - sus ging mit sei - nen Jün - gern ü - ber den Bach Ki - dron, da war ein Gar - ten, dar - ein ging Je - sus

Continuo

6^b 7^{5^b} 4:2

4

und sei - ne Jün - ger. Ju - das a - ber, der ihn ver - riet, wuß - te den Ort auch, denn

6 6 6 4 5 6 4 5 6

7

Je - sus ver - samm - le - te sich oft da - selbst mit sei - nen Jün - gern. Da nun

6 6 4 5 6 4 5 6

9

Ju - das zu sich hat - te ge - nom - men die Schar und der Ho - hen - prie - ster und Pha - ri - sä - er Die - ner, kommt er da -

4: 4:2 6 5

12

hin mit Fak - keln, Lam - pen und mit Waf - fen, Als nun Je - sus wuß - te al - les, was

6 4:2 6 5 6

15

ihm be - geg - nen soll - te, ging er hin - aus und sprach zu ih - nen: Jesus (Bass) Wen su - chet ihr?

5^b 6 5 6 4 5 3 6

Example 1.1 John Passion, recitative, 2a, bb. 1–17

All these, together with several other types of leap, call our attention to the extraordinary events that are unfolding (any discomfort on the part of the singer would only reinforce this impression). Yet the prevalence of rising sixths also prepares us musically for Jesus' first utterance (the first move from third-person to direct first-person speech), almost implying his presence retrospectively through musical resemblance. We realize he was 'there all along', striking though his musical entry may seem.

Jesus' reply to the arresting party's request for Jesus of Nazareth, 'Ich bins' ('I am'), is set as a simple cadential rising fourth (2c, b. 23), again something that is endemic to the music just heard, since the chorus 'Jesum von Nazareth' (2b) is based on a prominent circle-of-fifths pattern with the bass line rising in successive fourths. The same sort of sequence was a major part of the harmonic direction of the opening chorus (set up in the opening ritornello, bb. 11–16). Even if this had not been so, Jesus' cadential formula would still represent the most basic harmonic movement possible in tonal music, dominated as it is by the concept of the perfect cadence. As Eric Chafe has observed, his 'I AM' statement is Jesus' reference to God's address to Moses in Exodus 3, and therefore represents his speaking as God (something that is entirely unique to the fourth Gospel).⁸⁶ But for present purposes, approaching this Passion from the point of view of our first encounter with Jesus, the most striking factor is surely that Jesus is not heard as a figure markedly separate from the rest of the proceedings. Indeed, his next utterance (2e, b. 36) begins more or less as an inverted answer to the Evangelist's phrase (i.e. spanning a sixth in contrary motion).

It may well be that Bach thought of giving some of the characters a certain degree of musical personality. Pilate's first two statements, for instance, contain matching melodic profiles, including a prominent diminished fifth (16a, bb. 8–10; 16c, bb. 39–41). While one might be tempted to find a strained semantic relationship (between say, the 'accusation' of the Jews in the first instance, 'and judge him according to your law' in the second), it is surely more fundamental that this helps us recognize Pilate in a musical way, as if he had a particular accent or form of speech (we encounter another characteristic diminished fifth in 16e, b. 72, and again in 18a, b. 16). If Jesus has any musical character, it tends to lie in the relatively large melodic span of his lines, something that might distinguish him from the other characters, but certainly not from the

⁸⁶ See Chafe, *Tonal Allegory*, p. 323; Michael Marissen, *Lutheranism, Anti-Judaism and Bach's St John Passion – With an Annotated Literal Translation of the Libretto* (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 13–14.

Evangelist who requires an enormous vocal range; neither, indeed, does the range distinguish him greatly from Pilate.

However, in 4, bb. 11–12, Jesus' 'Ich bins' fourth is extended into a broader arpeggio in F major, something which is replicated in A minor in 10, bb. 29–30, in E minor in 16e, bb. 74–5, and 18a, bb. 4–5. Lest we should believe that Bach were creating a Jesus Leitmotiv, we should note the striking degree to which Pilate seems to imitate Jesus' phraseology: in 18a, for instance, Pilate's entry begins with the characteristic fourth (b. 2) that Jesus is to recall in b. 4 (but note that the Evangelist also opens with a fourth in b. 1); Pilate couples this with a Jesus-like octave span in bb. 17–18. When he introduces Jesus to the Jews as 'their King' he sings in the sort of arpeggio that Jesus himself might have used (23c, bb. 43–4), and, finally, when exasperated by the request to change his caption on the cross ('Was ich geschrieben habe' in 25c, bb. 30–1), he begins with the same melodic phrase that Jesus first used back in 4, bb. 12–13. As Chafe has noted, Peter's denials in 10, bb. 14–15 and 12c, b. 24 are feeble attempts at imitating Jesus' rising fourths;⁸⁷ we almost hear the local accent that associates them, and which ultimately gives Peter away (as we learn in Matthew's account).

A hermeneutical interpretation of Pilate's relation to Jesus would perhaps latch on to these similarities and draw a host of conclusions: Pilate is revealing the truth of Jesus' identity in what he sings but not what he says; perhaps he is secretly showing allegiance to Jesus in order to fulfil God's broader plan; perhaps, more contentiously, he is showing that the Romans are closer to Jesus than the Jews. But the desire for finding such concrete meanings surely obscures something much more fundamental about this musical representation of Jesus: his utterances are striking enough, clear and dignified, and he has a tendency to sing in euphonious arpeggios, but his music is not essentially distinguished from the rest of the musical texture. Indeed, if anything, he seems to grow out of the very substance of tonal music, inextricably connected to everything in it, as if harmonically prior to the principles upon which it is built. In short, this would seem to evoke precisely the sort of figure that John's Gospel, uniquely, implies: one who *is* before all time and human existence. He is a figure defined by resemblance rather than difference, however dramatic the narrative or piquant the word-painting. This is clearly a pre-subjective Jesus, one whose turns of phrase might be picked up by others, not because Bach is making any specific theological point but because *all* the

⁸⁷ Chafe, *Tonal Allegory*, pp. 323–4.

characters are essentially pre-subjective, lacking any modern sense of individuality, and performing a role in a preordained ugly event in which they have no independent choice.

What, then, of Bach's representation of Jesus, just three years later, in the Matthew Passion? The most obvious difference is, of course, the use of the strings of orchestra 1 to provide a sort of 'halo' around Jesus' utterances. This was an idea Bach might have got most directly from the Mark Passion he performed in Weimar and Leipzig, which he believed to be by Keiser.⁸⁸ It can be traced in several previous works besides,⁸⁹ so it can hardly represent an innovation on Bach's part; but it clearly suggests that there was a tradition for highlighting Jesus in concerted Passion settings over the previous decades.

Jesus in the Matthew Passion seems to have the same sort of large arpeggiated spans as he has in the John Passion (see MP 18, b. 4 in the major, and then in the minor, bb. 11–12); arpeggiated movement is also evident in Jesus' first entry, MP 2, b. 5, where his overall range at his first appearance reaches from A to e' (John's Jesus does not achieve a comparable range until JP 4, bb. 11–13). Sometimes his span dominates those around him, such as in one of his last statements (MP 36a), where the Priest's line, bb. 2–6, starts out with a respectable octave range, but finishes with his question 'der Sohn Gottes?' inside this range, on the fifth degree, in a gesture of contraction. Jesus' reply, with its broad eschatological promise of the Son of Man sitting at the right side of 'the power', seems rather to open out from the middle of the range, into an extended unfolding of the dominant of E minor, and finally hitting the top e' in b. 12.

Most striking, from the start of the Matthew Passion 2, bb. 5–7, is the greater rhythmic and melodic variety in Jesus' lines and a degree of chromatic inflection (derived from the melodic shape of a Neapolitan sixth) within a diminished seventh in b. 7 ([Example 1.2](#)). Jesus' next appearance in 4e contains similarly colourful gestures, a diminished seventh in b. 39 and Neapolitan sixth in b. 43 (together with the overall range of A to e'). Do we then have the case of a Jesus who is fully characterized and distinguished by his musical content? Superficially perhaps, but just as was the case in the John Passion, something of this initial characterization of Jesus is already in our ears, the Neapolitan sixth being essential to the cadence of the ritornello introducing the opening

⁸⁸ Daniel R. Melamed, *Hearing Bach's Passions* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 85.

⁸⁹ E.g. the Matthew Passion settings of Johann Sebastiani and Johann Meder.

Example 1.2 Matthew Passion, recitative, 2, bb. 7–8

chorus (b. 16); indeed, chromatic inflection is apparent from the very first bar of the entire Passion. One effect of both the sustained string chords and the fact that Jesus' utterances tend to be longer than in the John Passion is that some of his recitatives sound more formally cast, more directed towards cadences and seemingly more predictable than most of the Evangelist's writing. In 11, for instance, the tonicization of F minor in bb. 8–9 sets up the cadence in E \flat major (b. 12) three bars in advance (as supertonic, proceeding to dominant). This formalizing tendency becomes even stronger later in the same recitative when Jesus institutes the Eucharist, breaking into an arioso in triple time, which is a unique occurrence within the entire array of recitatives in both Bach Passions. Less rounded, but also containing motivic integration and directed melody, is Jesus' next recitative, 14, bb. 7–10, with the reference to the prophecy 'Ich werde den Hirten schlagen' ('I will strike the shepherd').

As in the John Passion, there is a tendency for Peter to imitate Jesus' turns of phrase, the latter's descending major sixth in 16, b. 7, and twice-descending diminished seventh in bb. 8–9, turning into the intervallically identical descending major sixth for Peter in b. 11 (a tone higher); Peter's Neapolitan sixth in b. 12 might also be a memory of what he had earlier heard from Jesus. However, it is impossible to ignore that the Evangelist also uses a descending sixth (now minor) to introduce Peter in b. 10 and he also imitates Peter's rising minor sixth of b. 12 in bb. 13–14 (perhaps to underline 'Desgleichen', i.e. 'the same' as is said by all the disciples, see [Example 1.3](#)). While it is possible to hear this again as a sort of common accent shared between Jesus and his disciples (or, to adopt the phraseology of Ruth HaCohen, their sympathetic bonding), part of the effect is also a sense of musical unification, over and above what the characters and narrator actually say. It is as if the music provides us with the equivalent

6

Vln I & II
Vla

Bass

Jesus

Wahr - lich, ich sa - ge dir: In die - ser Nacht, e - he - der Hahn - krä - het, wirst

Continuo

9

Str.

Tenor

Evangelist

Pe - trus sprach zu ihm:

Bass

du mich drei - mal ver - leug - nen. Und wenn ich mit dir ster - ben

Cnt.

12

Tenor

Evangelist

Des - glei - chen sag - ten auch al - le Jün - ger.

Bass

müß - te, so will ich dich nicht ver - leug - nen.

Cnt.

Example 1.3 Matthew Passion, recitative, 16, bb. 6–15

of a viewpoint or perspective in terms of painting, one that both frames and conditions the form of representation. In other words, perhaps the subjectivity we intuit here is that of the composer himself, lining up the intervallic counters in a satisfying fashion, different inflections of the same interval expressing three different speakers and bridging the gap between first- and third-person speech.

A similar role is played by intervals in the recitative leading up to Jesus' arrest (26), where the diminished seventh is given prominence in the Evangelist's line (bb. 2 and 4, together with the intervallically identical rising major sixth in b. 3) and taken over directly by Jesus in bb. 8–9, and employed repeatedly up to b. 15, as Jesus exclaims that his hour of betrayal has indeed come, exhorting the disciples to wake up and witness the arrival of Judas. Both the narrator and the primary character are painted in the same sort of painful intervals, but Jesus' human presence is still vividly evoked in the many breaks in his line (as if he were short of breath), the string accompaniment filling in these pauses as if it were sensing his distress (bb. 10.2–3, 11.2, 13.2, 14.4).

In all, then, Matthew's Jesus is vividly portrayed with as much rhythmic, melodic and harmonic nuance as the recitative style allows. Sometimes the span of his lines is broader than the other voices, and he is always highlighted by the strings, which underline his presence. But, just as in the John Passion, his musical stuff is coterminous with that around him, even if his range of expression and gesture is rather wider than in the earlier Passion. Yet despite the essential similarity, do we not sense his presence as a special figure within the Matthew Passion as a whole? There must then be something further that contributes to our sense of Jesus' presence.

This question of presence is a challenging one, since part of Bach's problem in setting both Passions was to render Jesus as present as possible in an environment in which he is – in any objective, empirical sense – absent. In some ways, this is less of a problem in John, since Jesus' eternal presence, utterly outside the local contingencies of human time, is so all-encompassing that his physical absence almost doesn't matter. In Matthew though, the absence of the more 'humanized' Jesus is rather more of an issue. Indeed, the structure of the Gospel text greatly exacerbates this problem since the vast majority of Jesus' sayings fall into the earlier part of the text (Part 1 of Bach's work). Only those directly connected with the performance of the Matthew Passion will unfailingly notice how little Jesus actually does in Part 2. The final 'Eli, Eli' excepted, there is only one substantial utterance from Jesus, plus Jesus' enigmatic response to Pilate's question as to whether he is the King of the Jews, 'Du sagests' (43, bb. 20–1). Two of the Evangelist's references to Jesus' silence seem to evoke his presence, rendering our listening somehow more acute (33, b. 17; 43, bb. 23–4), and Peter's naked statements of non-recognition, 'Ich kenne des Menschen nicht' (38a, bb. 14–15; 38c, bb. 23–4), perhaps also make us sense that Jesus is somewhere near. This may have something to

do with the total lack of continuo support for Peter in the first instance, which encourages us to listen more attentively.

Most listeners simply will not notice the surprising absence of Jesus as the Matthew Passion proceeds, even in modern performances where the part of Jesus is usually sung by a dedicated singer who does nothing else. However, in Bach's own performances, the singer who took the part of Jesus almost certainly did many other things besides, singing not just the first bass part of all choruses and chorales, but also the two major bass arias that occur towards the end of the piece.⁹⁰ This might have provided some compensation, bulking up the sound of the voice directly associated with Jesus, but it is surely not enough to evoke his continuing presence. Indeed, this might well make Jesus less distinguishable to a listener sensitive to timbre but who is not following the text closely. Even the parts actually apportioned to Jesus in Part 1 account for a surprisingly small proportion of the piece; although they are as expressive and well-formed as recitative style affords, they are surely rather short in comparison with the arias and meditative choruses.

How, in short then, does Bach compensate for the literal lack of Jesus' physical presence (in both Passions), together with his uneven representation in the Gospel text of Matthew? I would suggest that the development of the figure of Jesus is artificially achieved through the way the music around him is developed, somehow pointing towards a central, essential subject through its own tendency towards relative autonomy. In political terms, the often absent, transcendent and absolute monarch is 'authorized' by the subjectivity of the music. This subjectivity is most pronounced in those movements that relate to Bach's Leipzig present, namely the arias and meditative dialogues, movements that tend to be clustered at the outer extremes in the John Passion but which literally dominate the entire progress of the Matthew Passion. It was in these movements that Bach was presumably playing most to the subjective presence of his listeners; he could almost be said to be experimenting with different conceptions of subjectivity, as various characters formulate themselves in relation to the transcendent figure of their saviour. Jesus is 'authorized' by his subjects through their very development as subjects in their own right. Ruth HaCohen, taking a slightly different, but very productive approach to the absence of Jesus, suggests that his presence is animated by various sympathetic spirals created by the individual and collective personae

⁹⁰ See John Butt, 'Bach's Vocal Scoring: What Can it Mean?', *Early Music* 26 (1998), 99–107 and Melamed, *Hearing Bach's Passions*, pp. 45–6. This topic is covered in more detail on p. 204.

evoked by Bach and Picander: 'The *Passion* gradually is filled with the emotional surges projected from various planes of existence and emotional positions, rendering a kind of negative image (in the photographic sense) of Jesus, the absent subject. Thus he comes into being.'⁹¹

The authorizing subjects

It is important to remember in relation to the arias that the voices do not represent specific characters in the story, as they would do in operas or, generally, in the genre of the *Passion* oratorio where all the text is free poetry rather than biblical. The voices may certainly empathize with a specific character, such as Peter, Judas, Simon of Cyrene or even Jesus himself, as in the case of 'Geduld' (35), or the arioso ('recitativo') 'O Schmerz!' (19), both from the *Matthew Passion*. If such a connection could be inferred, Bach seems to go out of his way to ensure that the singer of the aria is a different voice from that embodying the character within the narrative recitative. Thus 'Ach, mein Sinn' of the *John Passion* (13) is sung by a tenor (as is its 1725 replacement, 'Zerschmettert mich'), while Peter, to whom it surely relates, is a bass; at the equivalent point in the *Matthew Passion*, 'Erbarme dich' (39) is sung by an alto.⁹² The voices of the aria therefore seem to represent abstract entities in the present, often inspired by characters in the drama (particularly given that they came, in Bach's performances, from the same body of singers who together presented the drama) but relating more directly to the listener. While they are essentially abstract, then, they also embody a considerable degree of character and expression, as if they were both subjects in their own right and objects for the listener.

Other than the saturation of these movements with unarguably expressive gestures, how might this music be said to create subjectivity in the deeper sense of the individuation and deepening of human character? Much might lie in the relation of vocal lines to the so-called 'accompaniments'. These are far more than mere accompaniments since, in terms of Bach's compositional process in general, the opening *ritornelli* often show the composer working at the most intense level in order to provide the

⁹¹ Ruth HaCohen, 'The Music of Sympathy in the Arts of the Baroque; or, the Use of Difference to Overcome Indifference', *Poetics Today* 22/3 (Fall 2001), 607–50, quote from 643.

⁹² Even in the case of 'Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder' (*Matthew Passion*, 42), where both Judas and the voice of the aria are in the bass register, Bach wrote the part of Judas into a separate part, for a singer who appears in none of the arias or choruses.

basic material for the piece; moreover, this 'invention' – in Laurence Dreyfus's apt terminology – will often be of considerable influence on the way the piece subsequently unfolds.⁹³ The vocal part of a Bach aria has long been referred to as an 'Einbau' (insertion) in German literature – something 'built into', rather than prior to, the basic material of the piece.⁹⁴

In the majority of Bach's arias and duets, the vocal part is directly derived from the ritornello material – any primacy the vocal part might have would perhaps lie in the way Bach may have constructed the basic head motives in relation to the opening words and implications of the text. This approach could be related to the traditional conception of the human subject, by which the individual fits into a pre-existent order, both political and religious. Although the vocal line might superficially seem to be the dominant force, it owes its being entirely to what goes on behind it. This effect is particularly apposite when the text might allude to the way the human subject is bound into an essential condition. The first aria of the John Passion, 'Von den Strikken meiner Sünden' (7), is concerned with the absolute inescapability of sin, which can only be redeemed through the reciprocal bondage of Christ. The instrumental lines are all tightly interrelated, the vocal part initially an ornamentation of a line derived from the two oboe parts. The voice is, literally, 'bound' into the motives and ritornello structuring of the piece, any expressive content being dependent on this basic material. The most unexpected moment is perhaps the return of the opening text 'Von den Strikken', bb. 70–1, before the modified da capo begins (b. 73). This one moment of 'unorthodox' vocal writing seems to serve as an exceptional, rhetorical, moment, to underline the key issue of the aria, the human's state of inescapable sin. Throughout the texts of Bach's Passions we almost gain the impression that the traditional religious concept of original sin has become intensified into a Lutheran equivalent of the Cartesian *cogito*: to sin is the very precondition of being.

An essential relationship between the vocal part and the instrumental context can also embody a sense of union with Jesus. The text of the Matthew Passion sometimes employs the erotic imagery of the Song of Songs to evoke this relationship in surprisingly sensual terms. This is clear in the aria (13) 'Ich will dir mein Herze schenken' ('I will present my heart

⁹³ Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention*, esp. pp. 59–102. For Bach's intense work on the composition of the opening material in the Leipzig composing scores, see Robert Marshall, *The Compositional Process of J. S. Bach*, 2 vols. (Princeton University Press, 1972), vol. 1, p. 238.

⁹⁴ Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach with their Librettos in German–English Parallel Text*, revised and trans. Richard D. P. Jones (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 19.

to you, sink yourself, my Saviour, therein'), a text that was almost comically bowdlerized in the first Victorian translation into English.⁹⁵ Here the basic contour of the vocal line is a simplified version of that in the oboes, as if to emphasize the dominance of the implied partner. The imploring, if risqué, 'senke dich' is literally played out in the music by the way the vocal line seamlessly interlocks with the instrumental motives, taking over the first oboe part and duetting with the second, then joined in unison by the first oboe (b. 10, last quaver) as the verbal phrase is directed towards 'hinein' ('therein'). Of the A section, only eight of the thirty bars (bb. 13–20) are not a direct repetition of the ritornello in one of its two forms (i.e. with dominant ending, as in bb. 6 and 12, or tonic ending, bb. 24 and 30) and even these bars are closely modelled on motives from the ritornello. In the B section, where the physicality of the relationship is reversed, 'Ich will mich in dir versenken' ('I will sink myself into you'), the voice, now largely free from the ritornello material, seemingly takes the lead, with the oboes copying or complementing its rhythms (b. 31 onwards).

In all, then, the 'classic' ritornello aria suggests a pre-modern human subject, deeply integrated into a state consonant with the assumption of a preordained order. Physical and even bodily integration are clearly by no means excluded. Nevertheless, there can be a considerable degree of subtlety within this relationship, given that the vocal part can be profiled in more individual terms, terms that can powerfully suggest ways in which a subject can become reconciled with, or indeed negotiate around, the given conditions. The second aria in the John Passion (9), 'Ich folge dir gleichfalls' ('I likewise follow you') takes its immediate lead from the short recitative just before, which describes Simon Peter and 'another disciple' following Jesus to his interrogation by Hannas. The 'constructed' believer thus expresses joy at unconditionally following Jesus, 'my life, my light'. This sense of following is graphically illustrated by the way the soprano takes over the main melody of the ritornello, copied at two beats' distance in pseudo-canon by the flutes (bb. 16–20). More subtly, though, the voice instigates several new motives (e.g. the anapaestic snap in bb. 29 and 33; the new gesture for 'Befördre den Lauf', bb. 48–50; or the striking chromatic cadential passage beginning in bb. 61 and 107). The flutes and continuo seem to be virtually unaffected by these vocal innovations, continuing throughout with material derived directly from the ritornello.

⁹⁵ The B section text 'I will sink myself into you' is replaced by 'All things else I count but loss'. Novello edition edited by W. Sterndale Bennett, text translated by Miss H. F. H. Johnston for the first English performance in 1858 (London, 1871).

Violin

Alto

Er - bar - - - me - dich - - - , er - bar - me dich, mein Gott, um

mei - ner - - - Zäh - - - - - ren wil - len; -

Example 1.4 Matthew Passion, 'Erbarme dich', 39, bb. 9–12, alto and violin lines

Moreover, in the modified da capo of the opening text and music (b. 113 to the end), the vocal part is greatly extended and more expansive, as if expressing increasing confidence. The growing independence and dominance of the vocal part cuts across the traditional symmetry of the da capo structure, as if the commitment to Jesus gives the singer a degree of confidence and autonomy going beyond whatever is implied by the preordained order.

If the gentle deviations of 'Ich folge' suggest something of the human potential afforded by following and imitating Jesus, those of 'Erbarme dich' ('Have mercy, my God, for my tears' sake') in the Matthew Passion (39) seem to show the essential imperfection of the faithful individual together with the goal of ultimate perfection. This is especially poignant in the direct wake of Peter's failure to acknowledge Jesus at the most crucial moment. Many would tend to regard this aria as a superlative solo for alto accompanied by a violin obbligato that sets the scene, but which is essentially subservient to the voice. In actual fact, however, it is the solo violin part that has the most complete version of the melody, in the opening eight bars of ritornello, a melody that, as Naomi Cumming has shown, brings its own sense of vocality and subjectivity.⁹⁶ The alto line, on the other hand, diverts into counter melody after the opening gesture, or shadows the more ornamented violin melody (bb. 9–12, [Example 1.4](#)).

⁹⁶ Naomi Cumming, 'The Subjectivities of "Erbarme Dich"', esp. p. 17. While I concentrate on the sense of completeness presented in the violin ritornello, Cumming tends to analyse it more in terms of its affective content, seeing it as Bach's exploration 'of the subjective state of separation from God' (p. 38).

In other words, Bach has written a melody that is basically impossible to sing in its entirety. The voice can perform the fragments that come within its range but can only otherwise shadow the violin, singing a simpler version of the same melody or a countermelody. In an aria that relates so directly to human failing, we hear a model of musical perfection – the opening ritornello for solo violin – to which a human (i.e. the singer) aspires without ever quite succeeding.

The opening ritornello dominates the whole aria in a formal sense too: it sets the scene as a complete 8-bar unit, which is then essentially repeated – both in segments and as a whole – throughout the remainder of the piece. Often the returns of the ritornello, such as in the last section of the vocal part (b. 39), are not obvious in casual listening. In other words, a model of musical perfection – as realized by the agile violin – not only represents an unattainable model for the singer but is also there throughout the piece as the support of its musical being, sometimes more evident (such as when there is an interlude – the ‘normal’ role for a ritornello, e.g. bb. 23–6, and at the end) but just as often concealed. Here, then, there seems to be a musical model of perfection lying behind the music that could be heard as an allegory for a model of spiritual perfection, perhaps the model of Christ that we are all enjoined to imitate even in the knowledge that we can never entirely succeed. What makes this music sound so personal and intensely moving is surely both the exquisite expressiveness of the ritornello model and the very human efforts of the singer to approach this. The aria posits the notion of a heroic ideal together with the startling realism of the singer’s efforts, a productive instability that is a feature of Baroque visual art too.⁹⁷ This is not the fully modern subjectivity supposedly independent and free from the constraints of models, but the model here seems without precedent, despite its obvious dependence on convention: the siciliano rhythm, the midpoint move to the dominant chord, cycle-of-fifths motion bb. 5–7, and frequent references to the Neapolitan sixth (bb. 3.1, 7.3), which – as I have suggested – seems to be a signature of this Passion setting right from the beginning (see p. 71).

As ‘*Erbarme dich*’ is the first aria to profile the strings of orchestra 1, we might well be disposed to hear these as presenting an extended version of Jesus’ ‘halo’ (the strings accompanying the solo violin tend to behave in the same sort of way as they do when accompanying Jesus, with fairly spare, sustained chords shading the solo line and providing occasional bursts of energy), and the solo violin part suggests an agility and power of

⁹⁷ Braider, *Refiguring the Real*, pp. 230–2.

expression going well beyond that which the bass voice depicting Jesus can accomplish. The violin, then, is a human artefact that allows us to reach things that we cannot 'naturally' do, thereby taking us to levels of expression and sensation that we would not otherwise experience. We may now begin to intuit why Jesus seems so present in Part 2 of the Matthew Passion, when he is so little represented directly. But, whether or not Bach's intention was indeed to give this oblique representation of Jesus, the overwhelming effect is of a supremely detailed and rounded humanity, positing ideals and hopes, subject and object, within the span of a single aria.

The case of 'Erbarne dich' invites comparison with the aria at the equivalent point in the John Passion, 'Ach, mein Sinn' (13). This is, if anything, even more deeply dependent on its ritornello material, containing virtually no bar that is not directly derived from the opening sixteen bars.⁹⁸ The desperate strains of the tenor line begin with a direct duplication of the main ritornello material (bb. 17–24) but thereafter depart almost entirely from the melodic content. Even when the tenor momentarily aligns himself with the motivic material of the opening (such as the dotted rhythm in bb. 38–9) we might gain the sense of someone trying to find the line and losing it almost as soon as he finds it. This is, then, the representation of a human who loses the way set out for him, hardly as well disciplined as the alto of 'Erbarne dich' but nonetheless conspicuous for the raging stream of consciousness that he embodies.

All my examples so far, then, have shown a vital relationship between the vocal part and the 'stuff' of the piece as presented in the instrumental material: some adhere closely to this, others deviate in a variety of ways, not least in 'losing' the way dictated by the ritornello. However, there are some instances in which the deviation is more absolute, where the ritornello material seems purposely to be ignored (rather than merely lost) in the vocal lines. Bach may sometimes have done this if, for instance, he invented an irresistible ritornello complex that, rather than being only partially singable (as in the case of 'Erbarne dich'), is not singable at all. This may well account for the longest and perhaps the most challenging aria to perform in the John Passion, 'Erwäge, wie sein blutgefärbter Rücken' (20), where the ritornello is so blatantly shaped by the string figuration (probably composed originally for violas d'amore) that the tenor can, at most, only allude to the figuration of the opening two

⁹⁸ This is succinctly described by Laurence Dreyfus, 'Bachian Poetics in the St John Passion' (forthcoming article).

beats (b. 5). If this setting of the word 'Erwäge' was indeed Bach's first compositional thought, he clearly soon developed it well beyond any vocal considerations.

But perhaps Bach did this purposely to set the tenor slightly away from the essential substance of the piece. After all, the text (at least in its original version)⁹⁹ implores us to consider how Jesus' bloodstained back is in all aspects like the sky, on which a beautiful rainbow of God's grace remains once the deluge of our sin has abated. The tenor's imploring 'Erwäge'/'Consider' (b. 5) encourages us to 'consider' the four-bar ritornello that we have just heard; not until b. 8 do we know what it is we are to consider, with the reference to the sky, and not until the B section do we learn of the deluge ('Wasserwogen', bb. 22–3) or the rainbow ('Regenbogen', bb. 25–8). There is perhaps some sense in having the tenor stand a little apart from this emerging picture: we retrospectively focus on the rounded ritornello that continues to lie harmonically behind the voice, but from which he seems to step out towards us. And we add associations to it as his commentary proceeds (sky, deluge, rainbow). This is surely no straight-forward symbolism, but, rather, a sophisticated exercise in discerning resemblance, comparable to the richness of metaphor explored by the English metaphysical poets in the generations before Bach.¹⁰⁰ Jesus' body is like the sky with a rainbow, even if this would initially seem absurd; Bach's four-bar ritornello invention is increasingly revealed to embody precisely the same images even if we would never have considered these at the outset. It is relatively easy to associate the music with the natural elements, but perhaps we are also encouraged to sense it as becoming a spiritualized form of Jesus' body, perhaps something akin to the 'real presence' of the Lutheran Eucharist.

Bach seems to have attempted a similar technique of using the voice as an intermediary between the music and the listener in the preceding arioso, 'Betrachte, meine Seel', 19, where the key word seems to be 'Himmelsschlüsselblumen' – 'key-of-heaven flowers' (not heard until b. 9). Here, without a separable ritornello, the accompaniment of violas d'amore (muted violins in the last version of the work) accompanied by lute (later organ or harpsichord) provides a continuous, ostinato-like texture against which the bass's musically independent recitation is profiled. As with the aria, we are encouraged to ponder ('Betrachte'), hearing first ambiguous images ('with bitter delight and half-uneasy heart'),

⁹⁹ In around 1749 Bach performed his final version of the John Passion, with a completely new text for this aria (beginning 'Mein Jesu'); see Melamed, *Hearing Bach's Passions*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁰ I am most grateful to Ruth HaCohen for suggesting this connection.

which we might compare unconvincingly with what we hear in the accompaniment. The comforting nature of the music only becomes completely comprehensible when we learn of the 'key-of-heaven flowers' blossoming out of the painful thorns; this is the only point where the singer's line directly shares the figuration of the lute.

If 'Erwäge' (together with its accompanying arioso) proved that the vocal part could atypically – but profitably – be separated from the basic musical material of the piece, Bach seems to have taken this idea a stage further in the Matthew Passion. Indeed, the later Passion stands out from Bach's entire oeuvre of vocal music in the surprising number of arias in which the vocal part expresses independence from the instrumental parts. Directly analogous to 'Erwäge' (JP) is the alto aria 'Sehet, Jesus hat die Hand' (MP 60) where the independent vocal line exhorts us to look at the crucified Jesus, with his arms outstretched to grasp us (a lurid image, to say the least). This line develops into a sequence of ecstatic melismas, which almost imply a singer transported into a state transcending that of the instrumental 'world'. Here, too, the idea of the singer as standing between us and the instruments is taken a stage further by the inclusion of the second choir, asking the same questions that we might ask ('Wohin?', 'Wo?'; 'Where to?', 'Where?'), to which the answer is 'In Jesu Armen' ('in Jesus' arms').

The idea of splitting the subject position represented in the vocal parts is evident right from the beginning of the Matthew Passion, with its dialogic opening chorus, and the notion of a singer as independent from the instrumental material is established in the first aria, 'Buß und Reu' (6). Here the text expresses the reality of human penitence and remorse, and the singer bursts in with new, highly chromatic material. It is almost as if she were entirely unaware of the ritornello, which is a sort of courtly dance presenting a conventionalized portrayal of melancholy. If the personality implied by the vocal part has indeed heard the music (as was implicit in the John Passion's 'Erwäge', 20), she would seem to have judged its stylized emotion entirely inadequate for expressing her remorse ([Example 1.5](#)). Only in b. 33 does the vocal line become assimilated to the head motive and then only momentarily, for four bars.

This sense of separation is also evident in the preceding arioso (pieces of this kind are, somewhat inconveniently, labelled 'Recitativo' in the Matthew Passion). While, in the John Passion, 'Betrachte, meine Seel' (19) might be designed to make us listen to the accompaniment as a 'good' that is only gradually revealed, 'Du lieber Heiland du' (MP 5) profiles the alto soloist as standing apart from the relentless, almost

The musical score is for a section of the Matthew Passion, specifically the 'Buß und Reu' (Repentance and Grief) section, measures 6, bb. 1–20. The score is written for three parts: Flauto traverso I & II, Continuo Organo, and Alto. The Flauto traverso I & II part is in the treble clef, key of D major, and 3/8 time. The Continuo Organo part is in the bass clef, key of D major, and 3/8 time. The Alto part is in the treble clef, key of D major, and 3/8 time. The Alto part includes the lyrics 'Buß und Reu.' and 'Buß und Reu knirscht das Sün - den - herz ent - zwei;'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *p* (piano).

Example 1.5 Matthew Passion, 'Buß und Reu', 6, bb. 1–20

mechanical accompaniment (Example 1.6). One might hear the accompaniment initially as representing the ointment that the pious woman pours over Jesus' body, or later as the tears now streaming from the eyes of the speaker (thus transposing the idea of anointing Jesus' head to the present moment). Only for a moment towards the end does the singer become aligned with the flutes (bb. 8.4–9.1, 'ein Wasser auf dein Haupt', 'a water on your head'), concretizing an association of the speaker's tears with her own anointing of Jesus' head.

Otherwise, though, the vocal line is surprisingly independent, beginning with a prominent melodic profile (the rising minor sixth, which is later to be so closely associated with this same singer's most striking aria, 'Erbarme dich'), containing rhetorical pauses between each line, and presenting an increasing variety of rhythm and melodic motives

Flauto traverso I & II

Alto

Continuo Organo

simile

pizzicato

Du lie - ber Hei - land du wenn dei - ne

Jün - ger tö - richt strei - ten, daß die - ses from - me Weib mit Sal - ben dei - nen Leib zum

Gra - be will be - rei - ten, so las - se mir in - zwi - schen zu, von mei - ner Au - gen Trä - nen - flüs - sen ein Was - ser -

auf - dein - Haupt zu gie - Ben!

Example 1.6 Matthew Passion, 'Du lieber Heiland du', 5

(especially from b. 6 onwards), all of which seem positively to ignore the continuous accompaniment. If a connection is made at the last minute, we might infer that this is something the singer has decided to do after having first developed her own independent profile. She hears the flute figuration

as an object (say, the oil anointing Jesus) and then requisitions it as an embodiment of her own tears. No longer, then, does it seem that the singer is expected to be conditioned by a pre-existing order right from the start; she seems rather to find connections, or a sense of union, through the exercise of independent thinking and contemplation during the temporal course of the arioso. While the singer's independence from the musical texture in 'Betrachte' and 'Erwäge' (19–20) in the John Passion was perhaps made for the benefit of the listener (the singer being an intermediary between the music and the listener, acting like a preacher who rhetorically delays a key point), here at the outset of the arias in the Matthew Passion we hear the singer more as a subject developing in her own right. No longer does she adapt herself entirely to the order at hand, but she makes a sort of order out of the materials from which she initially distances herself; this crystallization of objectivity and subjectivity simultaneously is one of the hallmarks of the more modern subjectivity as it began to develop in the seventeenth century.

This idea is taken even further in the next arioso, 'Wiewohl mein Herz in Tränen schwimmt' (12), now for soprano, where there is never any hint of the voice assimilating itself to the sextuplet rhythm of the oboes d'amore (which could be heard to represent the 'tears' of the heart, accompanied as they are by the pulsing beat of the continuo). As in 'Du lieber Heiland du' she enters with prominent intervals (here a descending major sixth, although a rising minor sixth is soon to come, bb. 2–3), with the oboes initially ignoring the breaks in her line. However, they unexpectedly play a sustained chord in bb. 4–5, and again in bb. 6, 8 (oboe 1) and 9, as if wary of masking the singer's line. The change seems to occur at precisely the point at which the singer resolves to turn towards the joy of Jesus' testament ('so macht mich doch sein Testament erfreut'), as if this change of mood has a physical effect on the heart, momentarily stemming its 'tears'.

From now on, the sextuplet figuration, rather than continuing relentlessly (as suggested in the first three bars), becomes increasingly fragmentary, eventually coinciding with breaks in the vocal line. It is almost as if the oboes learn to listen to the singer, becoming first stationary (in b. 4) and, by b. 10, learning to interlock with her. In comparison to the first arioso, then, we gain a sense of the singer not only appropriating an established situation but even influencing its course. And the oboes seem to gain a subjectivity in their own right, in relation to the singer, first by setting up a pattern prior to the vocal entry (the 'tears of the heart') and then by showing an unexpected degree of subservience when the singer's

mood changes, and, finally, by developing a form of expression that complements that of the singer.

While the remaining five arias of Part 1 of the Matthew Passion are relatively orthodox in presenting vocal parts more closely modelled (at least at the outset) on the ritornello material, we gain a similar sense of the singer as an independent participant in the experience with the opening aria of Part 2 of the Matthew Passion (30). Here the singer (the same alto we heard in 'Du lieber Heiland du' and 'Buß und Reu', MP 5–6, at least in Bach's later performances of this Passion) enters with a prolonged 'Ach' for four bars before joining in with the ritornello material (b. 17). The agony of separation from Jesus, undergone by a feminine subject representing the faithful (and thus the church as the bride of Christ), momentarily separates her from the progress of the music, the instruments seemingly treading water on the dominant chord for four bars (bb. 13–16), waiting for her to align herself to the ritornello material (all Bach's singers were male, of course, but the Bride/Bridegroom imagery essentially puts all humans constituting the church in the 'feminine' position).

The second aria of Part 2, 'Geduld' (35) is, like the first aria, 'Buß und Reu' (6), one in which the vocal material all but ignores the figuration in the instrumental (continuo) line, generally steering clear of the characteristic dotted rhythm and totally avoiding the paired quavers (in this respect, Bach may have taken something from his own practice in the first two ariosos of Part 1). This independence makes sense in light of the text in which the singer calls for patience in the face of the false tongues attacking him – there is almost the feeling of him singing purposely with his fingers in the ears, the only moment of assimilation with the overriding dotted rhythm of the bass instruments coming in bb. 26–7.

It is interesting to see how this vocal role develops, since the tenor of choir 2 has not hitherto been profiled as a soloist. He enters first, at least in Bach's scoring, as one of the two false witnesses just prior to his arioso and aria (33), something that renders his immediate transformation into a figure empathetic with Jesus in the face of false accusations especially striking. The arioso 'Mein Jesus schweigt zu falschen Lügen stille' (34), describes how Jesus remains silent before false lies, and how we should similarly be silent in persecution. The vocal line, predictably, ignores the punctuated chords in the oboes and continuo (to which a viola da gamba was later added). We might initially hear these rather uncomfortable chords as representing the lies that Jesus ignores, the spaces between them as his silence; by the end we might hear these as the torment that the singer himself resolves to endure in silence. The notion of this singer as a

tabula rasa who resolves to imitate Jesus is underlined by the fact that he seems to imitate the gestures of the others he will have heard singing similar expressive ariosos in Part 1. The phrase he employs for 'zu falschen Lügen stille' (bb. 1–2) uses virtually the same scale degrees as we heard in the soprano arioso 'Wiewohl' (12, for the words 'mein Herz in Tränen schwimmt') and in practically the same position within the arioso (bb. 1–2). He also perhaps imitates his tenor colleague in choir 1 (who is also the Evangelist in Bach's scoring), who sings something similar in b. 2 of the arioso 'O Schmerz!' (19): 'hier zittert das gequälte Herz'. There follow several by now familiar melodic gestures: descending minor sixth, bb. 2–3, ascending minor sixth, bb. 8–9, and, most striking of all, the Neapolitan sixth in b. 9. Moreover, the phrase 'und daß wir in dergleichen Pein', bb. 6–7, is virtually a quotation of the alto's music for 'so lasse mir inzwischen zu' in the first arioso of the Passion (5, bb. 6–7). Both phrases relate to a sense of resolve in the present, or in possible circumstances ('so let me in the meantime . . .' in the alto arioso, and 'and when we are in such pain' in the tenor's), so we might imagine that the tenor has learned to acquire strength through modelling himself on previous examples.

Of course, much of this is a matter of identifying some of the expressive habits that Bach seems to have developed during the course of composing the Matthew Passion; it is nothing that is essentially symbolic, or even original, in terms of the individual gestures. But, in the context of this first (in fact, only) appearance of a new tenor soloist, we very much gain the sense of him trying out patterns of both independence and imitation set out by others musically, while his text promises something similar in relation to Jesus. By the time the aria 'Geduld' begins, we hear that he has benefited from his 'character training' and is able to develop his own musical persona, showing patience in the wake of the 'false lies', 'abuse and mockery' of the jagged bass line.

The alto of choir 2 shows a similar degree of independence in the arioso and aria following the scourging of Christ, 'Erbarm es Gott!' and 'Können Tränen meiner Wangen nichts erlangen' (51–2). In the arioso there is every reason for her to try and counteract the dotted figure that surely represents the scourging (particularly with her even semiquavers, both syllabic and slurred). Her pleas that the executioners cease their torture inevitably go unheeded, but, at the last minute, with her final 'haltet ein!' ('cease!'), she seems to effect a remarkable thing, namely the sudden enharmonic modulation from F# minor to G minor (the key of the ensuing aria). In other words, she has not been able to change the events, but she has been able to change the 'key' of the events, by effecting a change within herself

Example 1.7 Matthew Passion, 'Erbarm es Gott!', 51, bb. 10–12

(summed up in the aria by her decision to make her heart a sacrificial cup for the flowing blood); see [Example 1.7](#).

This is perhaps not yet the case of a Cartesian human subject becoming the central point for constructing both self and world, but it does represent in very vivid terms the way the human can change the meaning of unavoidable events through an act of will. The aria seems to show the effects of this transformation, the jagged dotted rhythms of scourging becoming the more languorous dotted rhythms of the singer's tears, now in the new, flatter (in the sense of having more flats) key of G minor.¹⁰¹ It is noticeable that this dotted idiom is – except in one bar (b. 19), and at cadences – entirely avoided in the vocal part. Thus the singer's own tears are objectified by the singer as independent subject, contemplated at a distance and seen to be of no effect in altering events; what really matters is the internal change of heart.

'Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben' (49), that aria which most seems to present Christ's innocence and love as a world apart within the turmoil of the Passion story, builds on the technique developed in the first aria of Part 2, 'Ach, nun ist mein Jesus hin' (30), by beginning with a note sustained beyond the length of any previously heard in the ritornello. But here there is little subsequent reference to the instrumental parts, just as in 'Geduld' and 'Können Tränen'. The vocal line's independence is especially evident in the way it straddles the junction between the central section and the modified da capo (bb. 44–5). Although the opening text ('Aus Liebe') returns, the voice continues a descending line (from g'') that was prepared in the central section (b. 43). The instruments return, appropriately, to the initial figuration, but in a considerably modified form, now in the subdominant (D minor). We almost get the sense of a

¹⁰¹ For a perceptive analysis of this transformation, see Chafe, *Tonal Allegory*, p. 421.

42

Flute

Ob. da caccia 1 & II

Soprano

mei - - - - - ner See - - - - - le - - - - - bleib - - - - - be - - - - - ans

45

Lie - - - - - be, aus Lie - - - - - be will mein Hei - land ster - -

Example 1.8 Matthew Passion, 'Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben', 49, bb. 42–8

singer performing in wilful ignorance of the conventions of da capo form, rendering the return of the opening text and its accompanying music continuous with the central section (see [Example 1.8](#)).

Something similar happens in the aria for bass and violin obbligato for the second orchestra, 'Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder' (42), which begins as a conventional aria with the vocal part 'built into' the ritornello material. Yet it is significant how much the vocal part begins to develop according to its own agenda, taking the tendency I observed in 'Ich folge dir', JP 9, a stage further. For instance, it resolutely ignores the ritornello theme when the modified da capo occurs (bb. 41–2) and instead produces new musical material to the reprised text 'Gebt mir meinen Jesum': upward scales it has had nowhere before ([Example 1.9](#)). And its last phrase (beginning in b. 49) relates to a pattern introduced in the central section (b. 37) rather than to the first, but now of course with the first line of text rather than the second. The loosening of the connection between music and text seems to parallel the singer's increasing independence and creative subversion of 'normal' aria principles. This is something already latent in Picander's text itself here, which consists of only two sentences. The second of these, beginning 'Seht, das Geld', is first heard within the

41

Vln I

Vln II & Vla

Bass

Continuo

f

f

f

p

Vln. solo

Gebt mir mei-nen Je-sum, mei-nen Je-sum,

Example 1.9 Matthew Passion, 'Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder', 42, bb. 41–4

A section of music (b. 17), and then forms the basis of the B section (b. 33), linking the first part of the B section both textually and musically to the latter half of the A section. Later, the latter part of the modified da capo of the A section uses musical material from the latter part of the B section. The result is almost like a developing variation, which both musically and vocally subverts the customary symmetry of the da capo form. We get the impression that the *persona* of the singer has developed during the course of this shortest of all the Passion arias.

The list of arias with a largely independent vocal line continues with 'Komm, süßes Kreuz' (57) and 'Sehet, Jesus hat die Hand' (60), the singer remaining resolutely independent from the dotted viola da gamba line in the first and from the affective oboe figuration of the latter. Only with the final aria, 'Mache dich, mein Herze, rein' (65), does the voice become entirely assimilated into the instrumental texture again, as if Jesus' death has finally brought atonement, by which the vocal part becomes entirely 'at one' with the overall texture, integrated into the ritornello material, Jesus now 'entombed' in the believer's heart. Here is the very singer who before had sung all the words of Jesus (together with 'Komm, süßes Kreuz', 57, which relates to Simon of Cyrene's burden as the first 'imitator' of Christ) and who now represents the comforted believer in the present. He is accompanied by the same strings that had accompanied the words of Jesus, together with the distinctive oboes da caccia, which had been recently associated with texts relating to Jesus' goodness (e.g. his generosity and love in 'Er hat uns allen wohlgetan', 48 and 'Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben', 49; his embrace of humanity in 'Sehet, Jesus hat die Hand', 60). This sense of unity, although musically consistent with Bach's

'classic' ritornello aria procedure, here takes on a greater resonance, since it runs counter to the vocal independence of so many of the preceding arias. The bass's integration seems to come as the result of a long process of meditation, an assimilation that is chosen rather than one that is automatically imposed. The assimilation is also set up by the preceding arioso, 'Am Abend, da es kühle war' (64), where the basic movement of the strings in quavers is directly aligned with the syllables of the bass's recitation, shading his lines as if seeming to hear what he is singing. This is like a transformed version of Jesus' original string halo, now heard afresh in our own present (the similarity of sonority perhaps suggesting that past and present are of a piece).

In all, then, of the fifteen arias throughout the Matthew Passion, only six are entirely orthodox in presenting the voice consistently as of a piece with the ritornello material. Of the nine that contain significant signs of independence in the vocal line (including those that might use the ritornello material but that significantly depart from it in some respect), eight occur in Part 2; here the only 'conventional' aria is the final one, 'Mache dich' (65). There is also an unusual balance of full da capo arias between the two parts: in Part 1, four of the six arias are full da capos while in Part 2 there is only one complete da capo ('Können Tränen', 52) and one da capo that omits the opening ritornello ('Mache dich', 65).¹⁰² Obviously, Bach may have included more full da capo arias in Part 1 in order to redress somewhat the balance between the lengths of the two parts, Part 2 having more biblical text. But what is perhaps more significant for the present study is the fact that the unprecedented spread of unorthodox arias in Part 2 coincides directly with that part where Jesus is largely absent as a speaking character. The fact that the bass soloist who takes his part (at least in Bach's original scoring) now also has two arias ('Komm, süßes Kreuz', 57, and 'Mache dich', 65, and none in Part 1) is the obvious indication of a compensatory gesture.

What the arias in general seem to do is to produce a much more vivid sense of human subjectivity in the present, whether textually defined by its longing for the absent Jesus, its inability to achieve perfection, its growing patience in adversity, its contemplation of the superhuman love of Jesus, or its desire to take on his burden. But it is the musical impact of the singers and their creative deviations from aria convention that

¹⁰² For a study of the two types of da capo arias in the Matthew Passion, see Karol Berger, 'Die beiden Arten von Da-Capo-Arien in der Matthäus-Passion', *BjB* 92 (2006), 127–59.

give them their most real sense of presence, subjective development and self-realization. In other words, by creating a variety of subjectivities out of the variety of singers across the two choirs (all of whom have other roles in choruses and chorales, some also in recitatives), Bach is suggesting that the development of autonomous, characterful subjects is a process of conscious construction, one that can lead to very palpable changes of state and capability. This more modern type of self uses artifice to distance itself from its 'natural' home in the pre-existent musical material, paradoxically 'losing' itself precisely in order to preserve itself.¹⁰³ Given the anonymous status of Bach's singers, they correspond both to his own pre-modern conception of subjects as essentially independent of their predicates but also, given the instrumental power of the musical techniques at his disposal, to the more modern Cartesian sense of the individual self constituted out of a repeatable, replaceable process. Subjectivity can become extremely vivid, intense and autonomous, but it is also constructed in the process of the music. This type of representation is something that music can do spectacularly well and is perhaps a counterexample to any claims that subjectivity and consciousness cannot be represented, and are thus an illegitimate topic for the study of historical change.¹⁰⁴ It may well be true that it is impossible to invent verbal descriptions of inner consciousness, least of all for other selves and those from the past. But music can not only represent a sense of consciousness – one that we can choose to map with our own – it can also demonstrate how subjectivity can be developed and altered over time, as this is acted out by the performer and traced by our own minds. Music, of all the arts, can embody a specific aspect of modern subjectivity by means of a procedure (working in musical time) rather than reproducing any particular substance, disposition or pre-existing order.¹⁰⁵ Bach's music can suggest a remarkable combination of the several potential modes of subjectivity available in the early eighteenth century, most significantly the sense of self-discovery (as seeded by Montaigne) and self-control (as seeded both by Descartes and the newer Puritan/Pietist forms of devotion).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ See Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 48–9.

¹⁰⁴ This is the opinion of Fredric Jameson, for instance, in *A Singular Modernity*, pp. 53–5.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Taylor highlights the move from rationality as something defined substantively (in terms of the order of being) to rationality as something inhering in the actual *procedure* of thinking as one of the crucial developments in modern subjectivity: *Sources of the Self*, p. 156. Rather than contemplating the pre-existent order, we construe our picture of things through the application of the process of reason: *ibid.*, p. 168.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

Jesus becomes a model for the ideal human, one that is magnified by the music's compensation for his increasing absence. Yet the model is potentially detachable from Jesus himself, particularly as so much of the textual emphasis in the arias is on the development of the individual subject. There is a potent openness in the increased subjectivization of the abstract characters in Bach's arias, whether in relation to the figure of Jesus or to a notional individual in our present. Just as the increased realism in visual art tempts us to focus on the represented figures for their own sake, independent of any particular religious identity or function, the same may well be true of this sort of music. We easily concentrate on the embodiment of feeling, the way each figure encounters its found environment and forges an identity, often in dialogue or relation to other figures (not least to Jesus himself). The more 'classical' a vocal line by Bach (in its integration of voice with its instrumental world), the less likely we are to stray from whatever we intuit its intended purpose to be. Still, virtually all Bach's Passion music is suffused with expressive dissonance, something that can easily lead us to hear the music in its human, concrete particularity. Such realism would be utterly foreign to much earlier religious art; an Orthodox icon for instance represents objects relevant for the spiritual topic with considerable plenitude, but without the danger of our being diverted by them.¹⁰⁷

The comparative absence of an active God in the later Passion, and the great lengths that Bach had to go to make up for the increasingly doubled absence of Jesus suggest that there is an element of compensation in this music, by which its form, scale and sheer impact betray a world that was no longer unproblematically connected with the hidden order of nature and the cosmos. If Bach still consciously believed in this older form of order – something that is highly probable, given his background and the theoretical literature he seems to have studied¹⁰⁸ – his achievement was to communicate this sense of certainty and security in a form that betrayed uncanny intuitions of the growing imperatives of modernity.

¹⁰⁷ Braider, *Refiguring the Real*, pp. 90–2.

¹⁰⁸ Although Bach's library of theoretical writings does not survive, it has been known for some time that he had access to some of the works of Berardi, Werckmeister, Niedt, Fux and Heinichen; see Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach – The Learned Musician* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2000), pp. 333–4. Recent finds show that Bach studied Renaissance music theory, such as that transmitted through Seth Calvisius, even late in his career. See Walter Werbeck, 'Bach und der Kontrapunkt – Neue Manuskript-Funde', *Bjb* 89 (2003), 67–95 and Christoph Wolff, 'Johann Sebastian Bachs Regeln für den fünfstimmigen Satz', *Bjb* 90 (2004), 87–99.

The Composer is created

This examination of the developing notion of subjectivity would not be complete without an interrogation of the concept of the subject who rendered the music possible in the first place. For, in his experiments in representing Jesus, together with his adoring, 'authorizing' subjects in the present, Bach raised the stakes as to what music can actually do to a very high level. As I have suggested, the particular threat to the religious function of this music lies in the degree to which it is successful in representing, and even embodying, considerable levels of subjectivity; in this way it gains the potential to be detached from its specific devotional targets. Moreover, as we hear the way connections are made between motives across multifarious spans of recitative and between lines within a polyphonic texture, we sense a particular musical intelligence that is going well beyond the mere adherence to the God-given rules of composition. Bach's single-minded vocation as musician may well be grounded in his understanding of Luther's Bible, but the musical objects of his dedication soon seem to be defining him ever more precisely as a specific subject. We might be reminded here of the way John Donne attempts to put himself in a subservient position specifically in his devotional works, but in a way that sometimes does not quite succeed.¹⁰⁹

In all, we cannot quite conceive of Passion settings of this kind existing without the figure of the single-minded authorizing composer. Most of the gestures, turns of phrase, contrapuntal and formalizing techniques are perfectly standard and part of a shared vocabulary, but they are pulled together as if from a specific viewpoint. However objective Bach's music might seem in terms of its component materials and techniques, it is an objectivity that presupposes a subject with a degree of choice and autonomy, one who freely chooses from an array of procedures without any particular homage to taste or decorum. The music thereby gains something parallel to the perspective of visual art, in the sense of an implied listening-point – but any such focal point is defined through the organization of the composition rather than necessarily existing prior to it.¹¹⁰ Much as Bach may have thought he was representing spiritual and historical truths, and somehow representing the developing consciousness of

¹⁰⁹ Glaser, *The Creation of the Self*, p. 45.

¹¹⁰ As Naomi Cumming puts it, 'Instead of viewing the subject as a bundle of static subjective states that exist to be "expressed", the acts of expression can be seen as forming the subject and constituting his or her states, through a unique recombination of elements.' ('The Subjectivities of "Erbarne Dich"', p. 16).

the believer, he is in fact creating these in the action of representing them. The music embodies and creates the world on which it is modelled rather than unerringly pointing towards something beyond our direct experience. With Bach, we can never be sure whether he intended this or that symbol, this or that theological meaning or poignant effect; but we surely sense with some degree of conviction that Bach must at some point have heard what we hear, have recognized something of himself in this music as we do of ourselves. As Braider comments in relation to Vermeer's *Art of Painting*, this artist pictures his world so acutely on the condition that he first actually belongs to it.¹¹¹ Yet, of course, all of this presupposes that we as listeners are also 'playing the game' of intuiting the creative subject. Perhaps Bach as the composer becomes such a part of our creative imagination because we too can shape our own selves through listening to his music;¹¹² perhaps his music is a mechanism or the trace of a process that is somehow common to both his world and ours.

¹¹¹ Braider, *Refiguring the Real*, p. 198.

¹¹² For the notion that the listener's subjectivity is identified in the process of completing the 'subject' of the music, see Cumming, 'The Subjectivities of "Erbarne Dich"', p. 33.

First impressions

A large proportion of Bach's congregation would have attended the premiere of the John Passion in 1724, together with its modified revival in 1725, and perhaps also the premiere of the Matthew Passion in 1727. On each occasion an organ prelude would have prepared the forthcoming Passion, setting something of the appropriate mood and – most important – establishing tonalities to enable the instrumentalists to tune. Perhaps one would have turned to the opening poetic text of the printed libretto in order to prepare for the basic character and mood of each Passion.¹ In 1725, the opening text would have been the first verse of the chorale 'O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde groß', a well-known Passiontide chorale that would have engendered a suitable state of penitence. But in the original (and indeed subsequent) performances of the John Passion, the librettist compiled a composite text beginning with lines from Psalm 8, addressing the Lord 'whose praise is glorious in all the lands'. The B-section text (now contemporary poetry) refers directly to the Passion, but again in a tone of universal triumph ('Show us through your Passion that you, the true Son of God, at all times, even in the greatest abasement, have been glorified'). As many recent authors have noted,² the notion of Jesus' glorification through abasement is common in biblical commentaries of Bach's time and in his possession. More significantly, it is a central theme in John's Gospel, which is itself surely the inspiration behind the phrase 'at all times' ('zu aller Zeit'). The sense of Jesus' timeless existence and glory is

¹ Tanya Kevorkian shows that the practice of preparing, selling and reading libretti was widespread and popular in Lutheran Germany (introduced in Leipzig by Johann Kuhnau in 1709–10). They were clearly designed to prepare the congregation for those aspects of the text that were not already familiar from the Bible or the chorale repertory. Some writers clearly saw them as a way of counteracting the textual confusion that complex musical performance might initially provoke, thus preparing the listener for using the music more productively. *Baroque Piety: Religion, Society, and Music in Leipzig, 1650–1750* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 41–2.

² See, for instance, Michael Marissen, *Lutheranism, Anti-Judaism and Bach's St John Passion – With an Annotated Literal Translation of the Libretto* (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 11–12, and Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 282–5.

there from the very opening of this Gospel ('In the beginning was the word') and is something to which Jesus himself repeatedly alludes (8:58 'before Abraham was, I am'). Before a note of the John Passion sounded, then, the attentive listener would have been predisposed to interpret the story as something ordained from the beginning of time. Reading John's Gospel already conditions one to a concept of time that, while not blatantly recursive or cyclic, does not lay a premium on a precisely ordered and dated sequence of events. Rather, given that Jesus' death and resurrection have in a sense 'always been', his sacrifice and triumph are immanent in every moment the Christian might experience.

The text opening the Matthew Passion is rather more complex, and, at first sight, more opaque. Presented as a dialogue between allegorical characters named in the libretto ([daughter of] Zion and the Faithful), it would have been familiar within the context of the Passion poetry of Bach's time. A further element is the interpolation of a Lutheran version of the Agnus Dei, the first verse of the chorale 'O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig', which clearly establishes a central theme of the Passion, with Christ as the Lamb sacrificed for the sins of mankind. But what is particularly significant for this chapter is the connection between the answers given to the questions posed by the seemingly hapless choir 2 ('Behold! Whom? The Bridegroom. Behold Him! How? Like a lamb'). The notion of the Bridegroom immediately resonates with the traditional notion of Matthew's Gospel as that most concerned with the foundation of the Church, which, according to Revelation, is to become the Bride of Christ (and Jesus seems to allude directly to himself as Bridegroom in Matthew 9:15).³ The last book of the New Testament also depicts the victorious Christ as a lamb, sitting on the right hand of the father,⁴ much of the imagery borrowed from the Old Testament book of Daniel. Jesus makes an interesting allusion to this in one of his last statements in Matthew's Passion narrative, 'Von nun an wirds geschehen, daß ihr sehen werdet des Menschen Sohn sitzen zur Rechten der Kraft und kommen in den Wolken des Himmels' (MP 36a, 'From now on, you will see the Son of Man seated

³ This is something noted in Zedler's article on time, in the most comprehensive encyclopaedia of the first half of the eighteenth century, and prepared in Leipzig during Bach's lifetime. See Johann Heinrich Zedler (ed.), *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste* (henceforth *Lexicon*), 64 vols. (Halle and Leipzig, 1732–50); supplement, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1751–4), vol. 61, column 765.

⁴ See Lothar Steiger and Renate Steiger, 'Die theologische Bedeutung der Doppelchörigkeit in Johann Sebastian Bachs "Matthäus-Passion"', in Wolfgang Rehm (ed.), *Bachiana et Alia Musicologica – Festschrift Alfred Dürr zum 65. Geburtstag am 3. März 1983* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1983), pp. 275–86, esp. pp. 277–8.

at the right hand of the power and coming on the clouds of heaven'; Matthew 26:64). In all, then, the opening text of the Matthew Passion reminds us of certain characteristics of this Gospel, particularly in the way we are encouraged to see the Passion as a stage in the historical process by which Christ's Church is established, ultimately to find union with him at the end times.

The texts opening the two Passions thus seem to set up two different attitudes towards time: the John Passion, in keeping with the fourth Gospel's character, tends to promote a 'classical' sense of time as something rooted in eternity, emphasizing the eternal consistency of Christ's divinity and the sense of all the events as foreordained. The Matthew Passion libretto suggests a more linear concept of time by alluding to what will happen in the end times; there is a sense that much must happen and develop before the expected fulfilment occurs.⁵ This impression is reinforced by the opening of the biblical texts that follow each of the opening choruses. In the Matthew Passion the first biblical line is 'When Jesus had finished these sayings, he said unto his disciples', while in the John Passion the equivalent text is 'Jesus went with his disciples across the brook Kidron' (in John 18:1 this is preceded by 'After these words'). The Matthew Passion narrative preserves the sense of the Passion story as part of a linear progression stressing Jesus' role as teacher, but the omission of the similar backward reference in John's Gospel renders the John Passion narrative more abstract, less part of an ongoing story.

These observations would obviously be of purely theological interest if they had no connection to the way Bach may have composed the music for the two Passions. Yet, even a superficial examination of the music for the two opening choruses suggests differing ways in which music can inscribe the time of its duration. While both movements correspond to da capo principles (by which a substantial amount of material from the beginning is repeated at the end), the John Passion chorus is cast in a full da capo form, in which the entire A section (bb. 1–58) is repeated after the B section, while the Matthew Passion chorus is very much a modified form: the opening musical material returns (initially in a different key, the subdominant) in b. 72, and the final section, spliced in at b. 80, reprises – with added vocal parts – the music that was originally the second half of

⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan suggests that the two Passions differ in their fundamental attitude to atonement, the Matthew Passion building on Anselm's 'satisfaction theory' (by which Jesus pays the price for human sin, thus satisfying the debt we pay God), the John Passion based on Christ's victory over the forces of evil. In the latter, then, the resurrection is an integral part of the story. *Bach Among the Theologians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), esp. pp. 114–15.

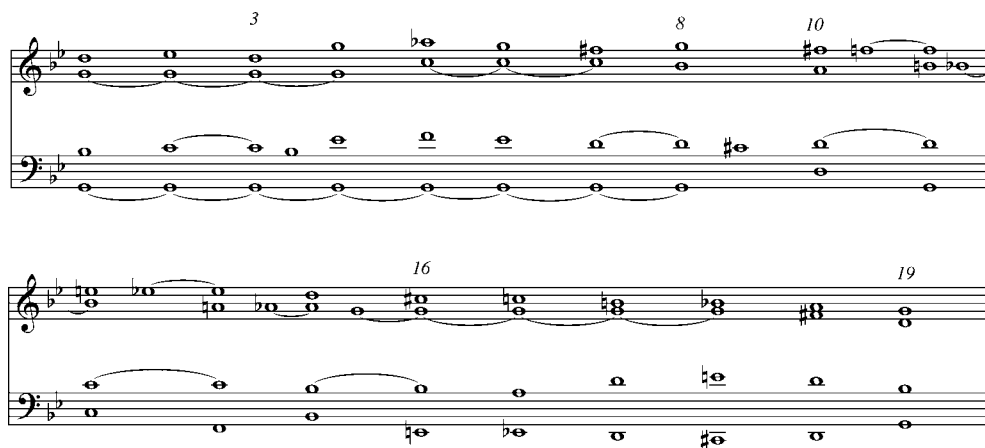
the opening instrumental ritornello (bb. 7–17). This modified form is further complicated by the interpolation of the chorale (which has the traditional AAB 'bar' form of many Lutheran chorales), the last line of which coincides (bb. 76–9) with the first section of the da capo.

As Christoph Wolff has suggested, the 'celestial' G major of the chorale representing the Lamb is combined with the 'terrestrial' E minor of the movement as a whole (which cadences on E major).⁶ Indeed, the entire Matthew Passion lacks tonal closure, resolving neither to the G major (of the 'O Lamm Gottes') nor the E major to which the opening chorus aims,⁷ suggesting that the work somehow craves completion beyond its own span. A final factor to consider relates to Karol Berger's perceptive observation that the modified *musical* da capo at the close of the opening chorus (from b. 72) not only includes the last line of the chorale but also sets the remaining line of Picander's text ('sehst ihn aus Lieb und Huld . . .') before proceeding to the *textual* da capo, a much-shortened statement of the opening text ('Kommt, ihr Töchter, helfst mir klagen'). Berger interprets this as demonstrating Bach's overriding commitment to cyclical time: that which was formerly successive is now rendered simultaneous, the linear model becomes subservient to the cyclical.⁸ Nevertheless, within the broader context of Bach's composition – which, as Berger observes, is essentially cyclic in comparison with the music of the later eighteenth century – this moment is exceptional. It is the first time that the singers of chorus 2 express the word 'Sehet!' (b. 72), as if they have finally learned the lesson that they have been trying to learn from chorus 1 (the more knowing persona of 'Zion') all along. It represents a moment when things seem to fall into place as a result of a learning process in time, something complementing the linearity of this Passion narrative as a whole, by which events occur on a timeline; some of these are extraordinary, one-of-a-kind (e.g. the earthquake scene). Simultaneity might well be of the essence of this particular moment in the opening chorus, but it is one that also suggests the extraordinary and unique, a moment of change or even conversion.

⁶ Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach – The Learned Musician* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2000), p. 302. See also p. 152.

⁷ E major seems to provide a sense of temporary resolution to Part 1 only, given that the final number of this part, 'O Mensch, bewein' (29, or 'Jesum laß ich nicht von mir' in the earliest version of this Passion) is in this key. Part 2, though, while beginning in the relatively close B minor, ends in the considerably flatter tonality of C minor.

⁸ Karol Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow – An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 45–59.



Example 2.1 John Passion, 'Herr, unser Herrscher', 1, bb. 1–19, harmonic reduction

If the broader forms of the two outer choruses suggest two senses of time, the John Passion's more rounded and the Matthew Passion's more linear (or at least progressive), this contrast seems latent in much of the musical material too. As in so much of Bach's music, it is the ritornello that provides most of the motivic material and generative processes for the remainder of the movement (see p. 77). The opening 18-bar ritornello of the John Passion comprises two equal parts: 9 bars over a tonic pedal and 9 bars of a circle of fifths leading back to the tonic, G minor (on the downbeat of b. 19). The harmony within this framework returns to G minor three times (b. 3.3, b. 8.3 and b. 19.1), each cycle doubling the length of its predecessor (2.5 bars, 5 bars, 10.5 bars; [Example 2.1](#)).

While the basic material of the movement famously presents a mood of great drama and dissonance, in another sense it is curiously static and recursive. This is heavily influenced by the most obvious figuration dominating the whole movement: the circular motive (actually related to the family of *circulo* figures in contemporary theory),⁹ which returns to its opening pitch every four notes and is itself repeated several times. The recurrence of the opening bar in b. 3 of the violin 1 part surely helps to establish the relentlessness that characterizes the entire Passion.

The opening ritornello of the Matthew Passion clearly has much in common with that of the earlier Passion. Its throbbing pedal is

⁹ See Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica – Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* (Lincoln, Nebr. and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 216–19 for the *circulo mezzo*, and pp. 290–3 for the *gropo*, which is the term most, but not all, authors apply to a figure where the first and third notes are the same.



Example 2.2 Matthew Passion, 'Kommt, ihr Töchter', 1, bb. 1–5, melodic profile

immediately noticeable and its sixteen bars are similarly divided into two halves. But instead of one half comprising a pedal and the other a sequential cycle, here the first five bars of each half present the pedal and each of the last three contain sequential material which generates a modulation and perfect cadence. The first modulation (bb. 6–8) leads to the dominant, B minor, in order to set up a transposition of the opening material at this level, while the second (bb. 14–16) effects a return to the tonic, E minor. Thus, although both ritornelli are tonally rounded, as one would expect for any generative ritornello section, the shorter of the two – that for the Matthew Passion – covers more tonal ground and returns far less often to the tonic. But there are more striking differences than this: first, while the most basic motivic material opening the John Passion was essentially circular and recursive, the melodic lines opening the Matthew Passion immediately display a sense of linear progress, generating a compound melody that rises by a tone or semitone every one or two beats and leading beyond the octave by b. 4 (Example 2.2). What gives this ritornello a sense of directional movement that is unexpected is the second modulatory sequence, bb. 14–16, which we might have expected to parallel the first one, bb. 6–8. A motive which originates inconspicuously in the opening countersubject (first heard in the violin 1 parts, b. 1.4) is now profiled with a new, distinctive articulation, the throbbing pedal is for the first time transferred to the upper strings, and – most extraordinary of all – the entire orchestra suddenly breaks into two, creating a dialogue which is predicted at no previous point in the ritornello. Indeed, as the movement proceeds, the dialogic elements are generally unexpected and the relationship between the two choirs is decidedly asymmetric.¹⁰

Drawing these opening observations together, it is clear that the opening of the Matthew Passion sets up patterns of linear progress, but also includes unexpected, seemingly unique events: a dialogic area such as bb. 14–15 would have been inconceivable within the first chorus of the John Passion. So far, then, the opening ritornelli, together with the full chorus movements

¹⁰ See Daniel R. Melamed, 'The Double Chorus in J. S. Bach's *St Matthew Passion* BWV 244', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57 (2004), 3–50, and *Hearing Bach's Passions* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 49–65.

that they generate, would seem to confirm the different impressions of time suggested in the libretti. Not surprisingly, some of these same implications can be traced in the broader progress of each Passion as a whole.

Cyclic and linear time within the Passions

Symmetry has long been connected with the structuring of both Passions and Robin Leaver has shown how this may well also relate to the structure of the liturgy into which they were embedded.¹¹ The two halves of the Passion fall either side of the sermon, and congregational chorales form bookends to each half. Cyclic time is essential to a liturgical, ritualistic approach to religion, in which important events and aspects of dogma are celebrated within a yearly cycle. This cyclic practice may also contribute to what Hans-Georg Gadamer describes as 'contemporaneity', an aspect of religious consciousness by which all mediation is temporarily superseded by a sense of total presence.¹² Cyclic practice brings one's own present into coincidence with the present of a redemptive event; this only happens if one's own presence becomes assimilated to the ritualistic time of liturgy rather than to the time of everyday life. As Hans Blumenberg remarks, each hearing of the Matthew Passion seems to mark the refounding of an institution, even if this cannot have any direct temporal continuity with Jesus' last supper.¹³

It is the John Passion that capitalizes most on this sort of shaping. Central to this is the so-called 'Herzstück' described by Friedrich Smend in 1926. Smend believed that the pseudo-chorale 'Durch dein Gefängnis' (22)¹⁴ is the central theological message of the John Passion (namely, the paradox that our freedom is achieved through Christ's captivity) and is therefore the focal point of a symmetrical arrangement of choruses. The six choruses concerned comprise three matching musical pairs, the first of each pair coming before 'Durch dein Gefängnis' and the second after, in reverse order, so that the first, 'Sei gegrüßet' (21b) recurs last, as 'Schreibe

¹¹ Robin A. Leaver, 'The Mature Vocal Works and their Theological and Liturgical Context', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 86–122, esp. pp. 99–108.

¹² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method (Wahrheit und Methode, 1960)*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Continuum, 1989), p. 123.

¹³ Hans Blumenberg, *Matthäuspassion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 48.

¹⁴ That is a part of a John Passion libretto (c. 1700) by C. H. Postel, which is coupled with a traditional chorale melody by J. H. Schein. See Friedrich Smend, 'Die Johannes-Passion von Bach', *BJb* 37 (1926), 105–28.

nicht' (25b). There is obviously a textual connection here since the first is a sarcastic greeting of the 'Judenkönig' and the second a plea to Pilate not to write the title 'Judenkönig' but to state rather that this was what Jesus had claimed. The innermost pair, 'Wir haben ein Gesetz' (21f) and 'Lässest du diesen los' (23b) have a degree of connection in that the first one is about Jewish law and the second about Pilate's obligations to Roman law. The second and fifth of the six choruses have by far the clearest connection, realized by many other composers besides, since they both involve the word 'Kreuzige!' (the second expanded to 'Weg, weg mit dem, kreuzige ihn').

However, it is not simply a question of Bach repeating the music in each case since there are striking differences between the recurrences: 'Lässest du diesen los' recurs in E major rather than in the original F major of 'Wir haben ein Gesetz', 'Weg, weg mit dem' returns in F# minor rather than the G minor of 'Kreuzige!' Only 'Schreibe nicht' returns in the same key (Bb) as the original ('Sei begrüßet'), but this return is considerably delayed by the interpolation of another short chorus, 'Wir haben keinen König' (23f), and the substantial aria 'Eilt, ihr angefochtenen Seelen' (24). In all then, there is a clear sense of patterning – in *retrospect* at least – with a central focus on 'Durch dein Gefängnis'. Hearing this in performance, however, the most likely impression (at least today) is of a sense of premonition, of things having somehow been foreordained. There is also a degree of change with the returns: most of the keys are sharper and there is much more material separating the last two choruses than there was between the first two.

A second symmetry in the John Passion falls with its axis on the central, triumphal section of 'Es ist vollbracht' (30, 'Der Held aus Juda siegt mit Macht', an unequivocal Johannine theme), surrounded as it is by the lamenting A sections and, further out, by the chorale 'Jesu, deinen Pein und Leid'. This melody was heard first with the verse 'Er nahm alles wohl in acht' (28) and lastly (after 'Es ist vollbracht') with the verse 'Jesu, der du warest tot' within the aria 'Mein teurer Heiland' (32).¹⁵ Again the pairing is not exact since the da capo of the A section of 'Es ist vollbracht' is restricted merely to the first four bars (essentially the opening ritornello), and the second hearing of the chorale is much more protracted, given that each line is separated within the overall span of the aria.

A further symmetry, at least in mood, would be that effected by the addition of the motet by Jacob Händl Gallus, 'Ecce quomodo moritur'

¹⁵ See Leaver, 'The Mature Vocal Works', p. 103.

after the final chorale, as would have happened in Bach's original performances. This then creates a lamenting movement to match the final chorus 'Ruht wohl' (39), the two thus surrounding the optimistic chorale 'Ach Herr, laß dein lieb Engelein' (40), which anticipates the joy of the last day. This symmetry of sentiments (rather than specific music) matches, in reverse, the way the first chorus presents Jesus' victory achieved through suffering (there, it will be recalled, the identical A sections refer to his universal glory, while the nested B section asks him to show this through his Passion and abasement).

As if to compensate for what could be a static and neutralized depiction of Christ's Passion, Bach also goes out of his way to emphasize the drama and bloodthirsty brutality of the event itself. We very much gain the impression that the crucifixion actually happened as an earthly event, but coupled with a sense of inevitability and compulsion that renders us entirely helpless witnesses to something that was foreordained, as if part of 'the Word' itself. Whether we take or leave the various theological interpretations of the symmetrical patterning, the effect is to contribute to the brutal inevitability of the events. The sense of cyclic time the choruses present is clearly in keeping with the character of the Gospel, with its emphasis on Jesus' eternal being and the notion that all the events of the Passion are necessary. Of course, it could be argued that cyclic recurrence, a central characteristic of Greco-Roman conceptions of time, is not necessarily compatible with the Christian sense of eternity as something actually beyond time, since time of any kind would be endemic to (and thus limited to) the created cosmos itself. However, that Bach could conceive of musical recurrence as analogous to the eternal presence of the Trinity is clearly demonstrated by the way he followed the Baroque tradition of reusing the opening music of a Magnificat or psalm setting for the text 'Sicut erat in principio' ('as it was in the beginning') in the closing 'Gloria patri' of his own Magnificat setting BWV 243/243a.

Symmetrical patterning is not entirely absent in the Matthew Passion. The most obvious instance concerns the recurrence of the words 'Laß ihn kreuzigen', where the music for the two choruses is essentially identical (45b, 50b). Particularly striking is the antithesis of the *arioso* ('recitativo') 'Er hat uns allen wohlgetan' and the aria 'Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben' (48–9) in relation to the two surrounding 'Laß ihn kreuzigen' choruses. Again, the symmetry is not exact. There is the interpolation of the chorale 'Wie wunderbarlich' (46) after the first chorus, and the second chorus is in a sharper tonality (B minor rather than A minor). The effect here is of inevitability, but also of some sort of change brought on by

recurrence. The sense of change is even more striking, and even more likely to be audible, in the case of the matching chorales surrounding Jesus' prophecy that one of his disciples will deny him three times (16). The first chorale, 'Erkenne mich, mein Hüter' (15), is in E major and the second, 'Ich will hier bei dir stehen' (17), is in E \flat major. Here the shared commitment to stand by Christ is audibly undermined by the transposition of the chorale down a semitone, a sense of foreboding that is also profoundly ironic.¹⁶

But, in all, the sense of linear, passing time is much stronger than in the John Passion. This is palpable in the sheer scale of the work and in the time it actually takes out of our lives. There is also the overriding structuring of the Matthew Passion, by which there are definite changes of mood played out as each scene from the Gospel narrative is separated by a poetic meditation (usually an aria, which is sometimes introduced by an arioso ('recitativo')). Moreover, following my study in [Chapter 1](#) of the placing of strict da capo arias in relation to modified ones, we see that four of the first five are strictly da capo (only 'Ich will bei meinem Jesu wachen', 20, is a modified and contracted da capo).¹⁷ After these, however, 'So ist mein Jesu nun gefangen' (27a), representing the point of Jesus' arrest and the moment at which events begin to seem irreversible, is far less predictable, with its choral interjections and sudden transformation into 'Sind Blitze, sind Donner' (27b). The aria and chorus opening Part 2 (30, 'Ach, nun ist mein Jesus hin') is left strikingly open, its half-close impelling us to listen further. Nearly all the remaining arias present modified da capo forms ('Geduld' and 'Komm, süßes Kreuz' pushing the convention to its limits), and 'Sehet, Jesus hat die Hand' – like 'Ach, nun ist mein Jesus hin' – departs from the da capo form entirely. With the exception of 'Können Tränen meiner Wangen', only the final aria, 'Mache dich', returns us to a true da capo form (albeit shorn of the opening instrumental ritornello). Thus, in the progression of arias at least, Bach first establishes a cyclic sense of temporality for most of Part 1, which is mainly concerned with Jesus' prophecies and teaching up to the point of his arrest, moves towards more linear, progressive models for the trial and crucifixion (although the modified da capo arias are still cyclic in overall shape),¹⁸

¹⁶ This second verse was not present in the first (1727) version of this Passion.

¹⁷ For a survey of the aria types in the Matthew Passion, see Karol Berger, 'Die beiden Arten von Da-Capo-Arien in der Matthäus-Passion', *BJb* 92 (2006), 127–59, esp. 127–8. He also lists the opening and closing choruses as da capo forms.

¹⁸ As Berger notes, the full da capo arias present a greater cycle (ABA), which envelops two lesser ones (the two A sections being framed by matching ritornelli) while the modified da capo arias present one large cycle (with matching ritornelli at beginning and end); *ibid.*, p. 131.

and returns to the fully cyclic for the final aria (the change reinforced by the da capo form of the final chorus, which is, after all, like an aria for multiple voices).

The Matthew Passion presents us with an overwhelming sense of change within a broader, circular sense of time, but it also seems to explore the idea that many of the events are unique, occurring at one time and not another. In Part 1, particularly striking moments include the disciples' shock when they learn that one of them will betray Jesus (9d–e), or Jesus' extraordinary move to a sort of 'spiritual song' for the institution of the Eucharist (11). However, it is in Part 2 that the sense of unique events is most noticeable. Particularly telling is the dropping of Christ's halo of strings at the point of his final agony – a one-time suffering as a human being that, as the sudden nakedness might convince us, was very real. Bach thereafter suggests further unique events: the striking earthquake scene, unlike anything else in the piece, and then the 'Wahrlich' chorus, set so strikingly in A \flat major after the A minor of the previous chorale and the D minor tonality set up at the end of the earthquake scene (63a, b. 14). A single event becomes a specific moment of change for the whole of future humanity. Other moments of change include the point at which Simon of Cyrene is made to carry the cross (55, bb. 8–10) or the extraordinary enharmonic modulation in the arioso 'Erbarm es Gott!' (51, bb. 9–12). Finally, just before the end, the string halo returns, first accompanying the bass who sang the part of Christus, in 'Am Abend, da es kühle war' (64), and then to accompany the final accompanied recitative in which each of the four principal singers is heard in turn, for the last time. Jesus' halo thus accompanies singers as witnesses in the Leipzig present, now seemingly transformed and coloured by him, all because of the specific event that happened many centuries before.

The Matthew Passion stresses the uniqueness of its component events and the sense of change that these bring. This feature is less obvious in the John Passion and, significantly, the two seemingly unique events it does contain are borrowed directly from Matthew's Gospel (namely, Peter's weeping and the earthquake after Christ's death).¹⁹ Although much of

However, here I am emphasizing the linear elements of the modified da capos, by which there can be a much greater sense of the change or development of musical material across the underlying ABA format.

¹⁹ The section relating to the earthquake was taken from Mark's Gospel in Bach's original version of the John Passion (1724), and was replaced by Matthew's longer text in the second version (1725). Both interpolations were excised in the third version (c. 1730), and restored again in the final version. See Alfred Dürr, *Johann Sebastian Bach's St John Passion – Genesis, Transmission and Meaning*, trans. Alfred Clayton (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 4–9.

Bach's setting of John's narrative is extremely striking, this is a matter of continuous dramatic intensity rather than a sequence of unique events. In one sense, perhaps, the entire narrative is a unique event, one that is ever immanent in our own time of listening. The pacing of arias is very different from that of the Matthew Passion: of the eight arias, only the fourth, which comes more or less at the mid-point of the work, 'Erwäge, wie sein blutgefärbter Rücken' (20), is in true da capo form, while most of the remainder use modified da capo structures (there is no da capo section at all for 'Ach, mein Sinn', 13, which is entirely based on repeated ritornello segments). This pattern is almost the opposite of that used in the Matthew Passion (where the true da capo arias tend to be at the outer extremes). But this is not the only difference: while the arias in the Matthew Passion are generally evenly spaced, coming at the end of each section of biblical narrative,²⁰ those in the John Passion tend to be bunched at the outer extremes. The first two ('Von den Stricken', 7, and 'Ich folge dir gleichfalls', 9) are separated by only a short line of recitative, as are the sixth and seventh ('Es ist vollbracht', 30, and 'Mein teurer Heiland', 32). The latter (32) is separated from the final aria ('Zerfließe, mein Herze', 35) only by the earthquake recitative and the short arioso 'Mein Herz' (33–4). Two other arias are placed at a little distance from these aria groupings: 'Ach, mein Sinn' (13) comes almost at the end of Part 1, and 'Eilt, ihr angefochtenen Seelen' (24) comes at some distance before 'Es ist vollbracht' (30). The only other aria, 'Erwäge, wie sein blutgefärbter Rücken' (20) and its accompanying arioso form the centrepiece of the arias and indeed of the Passion as a whole.

The relatively long stretches of time without arias in Part 2 may well have been designed to give the central trial scene an uninterrupted flow, one in which the recurrences of turba (crowd) choruses become particularly striking. But the overall effect is of a work with marked changes of pace. The placing of several arias close together clearly introduces a meditative element that is generally lacking from the more dramatic segments (although, as if to compensate for the possibility of losing the sense of flow, these arias are mostly in modified da capo form). But the weighting of arias towards the outer extremes contributes to the notion of the entire piece as underpinned by a cyclic construction.

If the John Passion veers towards a cyclic conception of time and the Matthew Passion towards a more linear view, it is clear that this is only

²⁰ The first two arias (6 and 8) in the Matthew Passion come very close together owing to the brevity of the isolated scene narrating Judas's betrayal that comes between them (7); similarly, the accompanied recitative and aria, 22 and 23, follow shortly after the aria 20, owing to the short scene in which Jesus asks his father whether the cup can be passed from him (21).

a dominant tendency and that both Passions also contain significant elements of the other's temporal patterning. This ties in with the fact that both the liturgy and the two Passions are weighted towards the second half. The second half of each is longer than the first and contains the crucial event of the crucifixion itself; each is followed by a motet, responsory and blessing. The symmetries in the John Passion often show a weighting towards their latter halves, and all but the central aria depart from strict da capo form, while the more linear arias of the Matthew Passion are rounded out by stricter da capo arias. Moreover, the meditative shape of the Matthew Passion, with its regular breaks in the narrative, evokes the sense of a ritual, characteristic of cyclic practice.

Karol Berger's overall picture of Bach's music as essentially embracing the cyclic principle is undoubtedly correct in its broader historical context. But I would suggest that there is also a dualistic sense of time that resonates with Bach's status on the cusp of musical modernity. In the John Passion he seems to balance repetitively ordered (or symmetrical) elements with a sense of musical direction, the rhetorical aspect of his music that plays on our expectations and renders us somehow changed through the experience of any particular piece. The *Goldberg Variations* provide another example: the piece does indeed return to its opening;²¹ yet it contains an obvious sense of dramatic intensification, in terms both of virtuosity and of lyrical expression. This intensification seems to accelerate in the latter half of the piece. There is also the question of the way the canons progress, with a steady increase in the interval of imitation (beginning with a canon at the unison, then one at the second, and so on). However, rather than coming full circle with the canon at the octave, the canons 'overshoot' with a further canon, now at the ninth. We have a sense of recurrence that could go on *ad infinitum*, but it is one in which things are somehow different at each recurrence – the notion of the spiral comes to mind here. There is also the sense that the two cycles, the cycle of the canons and the cycle of the variations in general, are out of phase, like two planetary orbits.

It is not difficult to find other examples of Bach's (purposeful?) combining of the cyclic or symmetrical elements with the progressive. Both the Gloria and Nicene Creed of the Mass in B Minor present obvious symmetrical patternings: that of the Creed centres on the 'Crucifixus', flanked as it is by a chorus on each side, then a solo, then two further choruses at the outer extremes. Yet there is a clear intensification in the

²¹ See Berger, *Bach's Cycle*, pp. 100–1.

second half – compare the ‘Et incarnatus’ with the festive ‘Et resurrexit’. Moreover, at the outer flanks, the ancient–modern pairing (in terms of musical style) of the ‘Credo’ and ‘Patrem’ movements is not mirrored by a modern–ancient pairing of the ‘Confiteor’ and ‘Et expecto’ settings; rather the stylistically ancient ‘Confiteor’ is paired with the supremely modern ‘Et expecto’, a triumphal conclusion that literally propels us into the future, towards the day of resurrection. In all, then, Bach has given us a sense of symmetrical, circular time simultaneously with a linear or progressive quality. The Bachian sense of time demands progress within stability, a dynamic approach to cyclic time that evokes something of the energy of a spiral.

The combination of the two types of time in the context of such a strongly narrative form as the Passion is particularly interesting. The cyclic approach tends to achieve presence, a sense of contemporaneity, by suggesting the coincidence of the liturgical cycle with that of past time. In this way, the Passion would come close to Bakhtin’s definition of the epic, where the sense of the actual present moment is effaced; style, tone and ritual tend to be distant from everyday discourse, so that the gulf separating the epic world from contemporary reality is bridged by a degree of alienation from the actual present (its space filled with a sense of tradition and continuous renewal). Bakhtin suggests that the epic past lacks relativity in relation to the present; it is complete in itself and avoids any graded temporal progressions connecting it to the present. However, to the extent that Bach’s Passions can also be placed in the actual present, through both their musical realism and the introduction of characters speaking within our own time frame, the Passions generate a more specifically modern mode of narrative, analogous to the novel. The novel relates to a present that is productive, specifically because it is inconclusive and forward-leaning. An event from the past is brought into contact with the present and assimilated to ‘the incomplete process of a world-in-the-making’.²² This process is entirely dependent on the reader/listener’s attention in real, linear time, since if she decides not to participate, the constructed world disintegrates.

All this engenders further questions regarding how Bach might have interpreted and understood time and how he might have related this understanding to broader questions of eschatology, history and the subjective experience of time. Is it possible that music such as this articulates some

²² M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination – Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 14–16, 27–31 (the quotation is from p. 30).

of the paradoxes of time in ways that are otherwise unavailable? And how might any such musical insight contribute to the overall question of Bach's relation to modernity?

Time, eschatology and sacred history

Bach's own conceptions of time and eternity were most likely congruent with the ambiguous attitude towards time characteristic of the Christian era as a whole: God's time by its very nature must be eternal, and is not really time as such. Augustine in particular wrestled with the paradox of time in relation to God's eternal being: 'My answer to those who ask "What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?" is not "He was preparing Hell for people who pry into mysteries" . . . But in matters of which I am ignorant I would rather admit the fact than gain credit by giving the wrong answer.'²³ In the Greco-Roman tradition time is often represented as relating to eternity by means of cyclic patterning, the 'moving image of eternity' set up in the heavens, according to Plato's *Timaeus*. This was often translated into earthly terms as the recurrence of a great year that led to a repeat of the entire cycle.²⁴ For Aristotle, the cyclic movement of the heavens provided the ultimate measure for all forms of time, the unmoved mover guaranteeing the unsurpassable uniformity of time.²⁵ At least something of this conception was shared by both Judaism and early Christianity. The most striking Old Testament reference is found in Ecclesiastes 1:9: 'The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun.'

Yet human time must have a linear, progressive element if there is to be any hope of our salvation; this was the dominant conception in Judaism and it was given specific urgency for Christians by the coming of Christ and the anticipation of his return. There must be unrepeatable events if Christ once died for our sins and rose from the dead and if we seek eternal blessedness through the conduct of our finite life.²⁶ Augustine tried to

²³ St Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), p. 117.

²⁴ See Wylie Sypher, *The Ethic of Time – Structures of Experience in Shakespeare* (New York: Seabury, 1976), pp. 109–10. See also Shakespeare, Sonnet 59, 'If there be nothing new, but that which is Hath been before'.

²⁵ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (*Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 2nd rev. edn 1976), trans. by Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1983), p. 582.

²⁶ For a convenient summary, see J. T. Fraser, *Of Time, Passion, and Knowledge*, 2nd edn (Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 22–6.

distance himself entirely from the notion of cyclic time as part of the human condition and saw human, linear history as consequent on the fall of man from the atemporal heights of God and also crucially necessary as the backdrop for Christ's singular resurrection, conquering death once and for all.²⁷ With Augustine's notion of the Catholic Church as embodying the City of God on earth, in contrast to the imperfect world as something in a state of necessary flux and inevitable decline, a dualistic sense of sacred versus secular temporality was propelled well into the second millennium of Christendom. The notion of the church as somehow standing outside human time gave it a relatively static quality, one that was soon to be articulated by a regular recurring practice of offices and festivals. Augustine's objections notwithstanding, a cyclic sense of time became endemic to church practice (as it remained in Jewish practice). It is as if cyclic patterning was designed to provide a degree of stability within a situation that was destined ultimately to change; it also gave an opportunity to purge the believer of guilt and the burden of sin, recharging the Christian's spirituality in a way that mirrored the natural cycles of day, week and year. Music, from the start, seems to have been associated with such patterning, most obviously in the increasingly standardized repertory of chant. Moreover, music's customary association with the proportions of creation and the movement of the spheres suggest that it was most fundamentally understood as a token, if not embodiment, of cosmic order rather than as something that effected change or configured human time.

If the Judeo-Christian tradition tempered its sense of temporal direction with a practice that was essentially cyclic, the Greco-Roman tradition reciprocally admitted elements of linear development (it would, in any case, be a mistake to view the two traditions as entirely independent of one another). This is most obvious in the structure of tragedy, something that was ceremonial in origin and ritualistic in practice, but which was also crucially dependent on a sense of the past as irreversible and the future as inevitable.²⁸ The Passion narrative clearly shares strong structural similarities with classical tragedy and, in the various ways it has been re-enacted throughout the Christian era, it is an obvious point of intersection between the two types of temporality (as indeed it is between the two

²⁷ See St Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), pp. 404–12. The principal texts relevant for the early Christian view of time are Plotinus (205–270), *Third Ennead*, Seventh Tractate; Augustine (354–430), *Confessions*, book 11; *City of God*, books 11–12.

²⁸ See Sypher, *The Ethic of Time*, pp. 1–2.

traditions, Christian and Greco-Roman). The very repetition of the story, just as in tragedy, means that we read its ending in its initial conditions and vice versa: such recollection and expectation give us the illusion of being able to invert the 'natural' flow of time, reading the story backwards as well as forwards.²⁹ Given that the Passion narrative is embedded in a much longer Christian story, stretching from the beginnings of biblical time to the end times themselves, the mechanics of tragedy as experienced in the retelling of the Passion story can be used to structure the entire system of Christian belief.

According to Augustine, only if we could see as God sees would we appreciate the eternal meaning of time, as if words and sentences were apprehended simultaneously: 'your Word is not speech in which each part comes to an end . . . all is uttered at one and the same time, yet eternally . . . if it were not so, your Word would be subject to time and change, and therefore would be neither truly eternal nor truly immortal.'³⁰ This concept of temporal progression set up in a single act of creation outside time was famously developed in Bach's own time by Gottfried Leibniz, for whom the co-operative functioning of the universe results from God's pre-established harmony. Everything is precisely co-ordinated as if timed by independent clocks which were set in phase at the moment of their creation. Indeed, the clock is a major image of the age, an image that represented the height of technology and one that is often pictorially represented in Bach's cantatas. The clock is an ideal representation of the movement of linear time, time that we recognize as unrecoverable, set precisely by God, yet which is also signified on the dial in a cyclic, infinitely repeatable fashion. The degree to which people were disturbed by the increasingly precise measurement of time, and the consequent control of human time, presumably depended on the degree to which they were embedded in a cyclic, seasonally based way of life or saw the growing rationalization of human activity as a tool for progress.

If Christianity implies elements of both cyclic and linear time, together with the sense of an eternity lying beyond time, there is a systemic ambiguity as to how these relate to the apocalyptic (final revelation): the notion of the second coming of Christ and the end times (Eschaton). For early Christians, such as those represented by the writer of the book of Revelation, the apocalypse was imminent (particularly in the light of the actions of the Roman Empire in Jerusalem around the time of the

²⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, vol. 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 67–8.

³⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 115.

destruction of the temple in 70CE). Even the end of John's Gospel could be read to intimate the return of Christ during the lifetime of some of the apostles (John 21:22–3). But, as is already clear, John's Gospel is much less tied to a specific timeline than the others, and its emphasis on Christ's eternal being and presence might suggest that we are in a state of 'realized eschatology', or at least have been so from the time his divinity was recognized on earth. This Gospel has sometimes been described as 'an apocalypse in reverse', a Gospel in which the heavenly mysteries are found in Jesus himself rather than in some future opening of heaven; his life reveals God's plan (Logos), which, if still mysterious, is to be realized in the future by the community.³¹ Matthew's Gospel is the one that perhaps comes closest to an urgent, time-based eschatology, something that is the subject of Christ's fifth, and last, discourse (Chapters 24–5) where he implores the disciples to be watchful for the Parousia (the second coming) and the end of time. The proximity of this to the Passion narrative might explain why Bach left the linking line 'When Jesus had finished these sayings' at the outset of the Matthew Passion, perhaps relating it to the eschatological implications of the opening chorus.

Nevertheless, as the Christian era proceeded and the Parousia seemed increasingly delayed, a less urgent eschatology had to be developed, one that was more inward-looking and centred on the spiritual progress of the individual.³² One way to avoid a sense of disappointment at the delay was to turn the issue round and suggest that the decisive events had actually already happened: even texts as early as Paul's suggested that the individual who was baptized and maintained faith was already granted acquittal in the final judgment.³³ For Augustine, having abandoned the millennialism of his early years, the final millennium of Revelation was symbolic of the era that had already begun with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, so that the believer enjoyed spiritual communion with God indefinitely as a form of 'realized eschatology'.

While Augustine's view remained the mainstream, apocalyptic thought endured at the fringes of Christian practice, and periodically flared up at times of crisis, such as the period around the Reformation; but it did not become part of an established religion. Augustine's sort of deferred

³¹ John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 381–406, esp. pp. 404–5.

³² For an excellent general history see Christopher Rowland, 'The Apocalypse in History: the Place of the Book of Revelation in Christian Theology and Life', in Christopher Rowland and John Barton (eds.), *Apocalyptic in History and Tradition* (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 151–71.

³³ Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, pp. 43–4.

eschatology tends to devalue the segment of time separating the present from the end: the present is prolonged indefinitely, if crucially inflected by the fact that the end will inevitably come.³⁴ The Augustinian viewpoint was largely taken over by Luther,³⁵ who generally despised the book of Revelation (except when it suited him to portray the Pope as the Anti-christ). As Stephen Greenblatt has suggested, the rejection of Purgatory in the Protestant tradition cut the living from ritualized communion with the dead, contributing to a sense that time is a neutral succession of moments having nothing directly to do with human concerns.³⁶

The Augustinian viewpoint was only seriously threatened by the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and the view that the world itself could be developed and improved. In this respect, Newton's interest in apocalyptic studies provides an interesting combination of viewpoints.³⁷ Eschatology in the more modern sense became a positive, more secularized affair, and, in Bach's environment, found its most optimistic articulation in Leibniz's view of us as living in the 'best of all possible worlds' (*Theodicy*), even if our local circumstances made this difficult to believe. It is interesting to note that Bach recopied in the margin the two possible dates for the apocalypse given in the Calov Bible commentary on Daniel 12:12, namely 1941 and 2408.³⁸ The commentary is circumspect about any such dates really being accurate and notes that some of the main signs of the end – such as the destruction of Rome – have yet to happen. Most likely, then, Bach believed that the apocalypse would occur well after his lifetime, in the twentieth century at the earliest.³⁹ Certainly, both Calov and history books from Bach's youth (see p. 118) adhere to the ancient notion that the span of the world is 6,000 years (from the understanding that one day for God is a thousand years, the seventh – at least for millennialists – representing Jesus' reign on earth). But there is little sense of urgency in the orthodox literature of Bach's time. Indeed, Bach himself may have had a particularly acute sense of the relativity of actual earthly

³⁴ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 148.

³⁵ The Augsburg Confession (1530), Article XVII, condemns millennialism, as spread by those adopting 'certain Jewish opinions': see www.bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.html.

³⁶ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning – From More to Shakespeare* (University of Chicago Press, 1980, new edn 2005), p. 200.

³⁷ See Rowland, 'The Apocalypse in History', esp. pp. 161–3.

³⁸ Howard H. Cox (ed.), *The Calov Bible of J. S. Bach* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1985), facsimile 200, p. 442.

³⁹ Blumenberg suggests that this 'secularisation' of eschatology, by which the end no longer affects the current generation, has some of its roots in Melancthon's modification of Luther's keener sense of a shorter period before the apocalypse; see *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 50.

time (and, perhaps, fortune), produced by Protestant Germany's conversion from the Julian Calendar to the Gregorian between the two consecutive days, February 18 and March 1, 1700, just two weeks before the fourteen-year-old Bach left Ohrdruf for Lüneburg. This also was the point at which he first became independent of support from his family circle.⁴⁰

It is striking that the apocalyptic imagery in the chorus 'Sind Blitze, sind Donner' (MP 27b) presents dramatic godly intervention as a possibility that does not occur, even if the affronted believer witnessing Jesus' arrest from the contemporary perspective demands it. Thus direct intervention in the present it is not an actuality or even an inevitability, however dramatic the music. There is a significant difference between this – articulated from the perspective of the listener's present – and the seemingly equivalent moment in Part 2, namely the earthquake that occurs after Jesus' death, in the time zone of the story. The age of miracles and scriptural revelation seems to lie clearly in the past, although the vividness of the music for both these sections might encourage us to link the immediate sense of the present with the miraculous events of the past.

Most relevant for Bach, though, is clearly the change in emphasis towards the subjectivization of eschatology, something that was very much part of Pietist movements (see p. 57),⁴¹ but which also clearly had its role in Lutheran Orthodox practice. Rather than seeing the apocalypse as an inevitable goal of human history, the imagery of the end times is reconceived as a metaphor for the individual's own trajectory and the urgent need for faith and repentance within the finite course of one's own life. This is by far the most prominent topic within the texts of Bach's cantata repertory, which tend to characterize the world as a false distraction and present the Last Judgment as something that is imminent on a personal level. The two cantatas beginning with the chorale text 'O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort', BWV 20 and 60, open with the premise that it is eternity that is to be feared and not the temporary misfortunes of the world. Only one chorale verse in Cantata 20 seems to refer to an actual return of God to earth, and even then ambiguously so ('Denn wird sich enden diese Pein, Wenn Gott nicht mehr wird ewig sein' – 'For this torment will end when God is no longer to be eternal').⁴² But in general, given that death – the beginning of the personal apocalypse – could occur at any juncture, the precise duration of the outside world is presumably of lesser importance.

⁴⁰ See Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, p. 525.

⁴¹ Rowland, 'The Apocalypse in History', pp. 163–4.

⁴² I am grateful to Peter Smaill for identifying this unusual expression.

Picander's Matthew Passion text is directed almost continuously towards influencing the believer's state. The history of incarnation, Passion and end times are all combined to encourage a change in the listener's own present. Universal human time becomes embodied in the time of the actual performance which then goes to configure the listener's own time. Much might also lie in the repetitiveness of this personal process, both in the course of each Passion but also in the entire sequence of church cantatas across the years, as if it is only through repetition that the listener's sense of self and personal preparation for death can be kept alive and active.⁴³

Bach's Passions might realize in musical terms the development that Frank Kermode considers a specifically modern transformation of the sense of an apocalyptic ending, from one that is temporally bound towards a sense of 'eternal transition, perpetual crisis'.⁴⁴ He sees something of this sense of crisis, personally experienced in every moment, as seeded in the New Testament itself. In literature, Shakespearean drama marks the point when apocalyptic thought begins to move from a sense of the imminent to a crisis that is *immanent*. While everyday life continues indefinitely, we gain a sense of crisis that is ever-present, indeed quasi-eternal.⁴⁵ But, at the same time, this sense of crisis is not one of hopeless deadlock; what seems to lurk on the horizon is a promise of the resolution that will ultimately prevail. In this way, Bach's music both sets up a sense of immanent crisis, on numerous levels, historical and actual, objective and personal, but also a sense of potential resolution. Something of this resolution is provided by the next stage in the cycle of the church's year, Easter being celebrated only two days hence. But, given the cyclic nature of Orthodox Lutheran practice, the entire sequence is set to be played out repeatedly and indefinitely. Passions are intentionally incomplete, designed for a continual replaying of the crisis they represent and the promises they hold for the future. This makes them very different from oratorios designed for secular use, such as Handel's *Messiah*, which presents a complete picture of prophecy, Jesus' incarnation, suffering, resurrection and the apocalypse within the one musical span.

The immanence of Christian apocalyptic is translated into an actual musical reality by Bach's Passions, into something that in Kermode's terms embodies a 'demythologized myth', since it is both actualized in the

⁴³ See also Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 201.

⁴⁴ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending – Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 101.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 82.

present and rendered capable of infinite repetition in changing human circumstances. Following Kermode's line of thought, we might surmise that Bach's move was to exchange the notion of an imminent end, as promised in varying ways by Christian doctrine, for a crisis embodied in the music. This is a music that capitalizes on the multifarious senses of crisis we might experience in contemporary life but which also provides us with a vision of order and concord. Further, we might add, Bach provided two different perspectives of this crisis, one (John) stressing its objective reality, the other (Matthew) its role in configuring subjective experience.

Human history

Having considered the apocalyptic elements, which seem to lie in oblique relation to experienced time, I turn next to the broad conceptions of time that might underpin human history. The distinction between sacred and human history is not always clear, given that the textbooks Bach may have read in his youth tend to treat biblical history, church history and secular history as one and the same. Bach, as a pupil of the town school in Ohrdruf, would have been introduced to history through Johannes Buno's *Idea historiae universalis* of 1672 (Lüneburg). This was perhaps the most influential school-oriented German history of its age and something that would almost certainly have conditioned the conception of human history and broader expanses of time for Bach's generation.⁴⁶ This is hardly history in the sense we now assume, since it presents a charming, but entirely undifferentiated sequence of historical nuggets that shows little historical method or sense of difference between past and present. The past was clearly common property, not something specifically made or reinterpreted in the present and certainly not to be subject to critical enquiry. The very regularity of the events, presented in rationalized columns, almost has the quality of neutralized, mechanical time, by which one moment succeeds another in totally predictable fashion.

Buno's history takes us seamlessly from Adam and Eve up to 1672 without even a change of format at the birth of Christ. It is presented with the help of engravings of animals relating to the letter in the alphabet that matches the number of the century. We might not be so surprised, then, to discover that Bach retained similarly naive habits of simple

⁴⁶ See Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, p. 40, and Johannes Buno, *Idea historiae universalis* (Lüneburg, 1672).

number symbolism throughout his life. The title page of the Calov Bible commentary, in Bach's possession, shows the same sort of historical outlook, stating that its date of publication (1681) falls in the 5681st year of the creation of the world. Much of Buno's book is geared towards developing the memory through the association of numbers, letters, animals and the detailed smaller drawings of events and people. Each picture presents each century as a simultaneous, interlocking whole, just as the columns of narrative place sacred history side by side with Roman or German history, followed by that of other relevant countries. Buno suggests not only that pictures develop the senses and contribute to pleasure, but that similar devices can also be discerned in texts, such as the Song of Songs, which presents a picture of the Christian Church together with her bridegroom (an image that is central to Picander's text of the Matthew Passion).⁴⁷ It is clear that all relationships are ones of *similarity* rather than difference or development. In the Introduction, we learn that not only spiritual leaders but also professionals such as doctors, politicians and soldiers should benefit from history as a storehouse of consistently valid information.

This same tendency towards the past is evident in the principal music history of the same era, Wolfgang Caspar Printz's *Historische Beschreibung* of 1690. Just as with Buno, sacred and secular history flow entirely together, but now integrated with the history of music. For instance, we learn that vocal music was invented by Adam, instrumental music by Jubal. Apollo and other Grecian colleagues do play a part in the development of music but they, naturally, must have lived after the Flood.⁴⁸ The study ends with a traditional *laus musicae*, which places numerous historical anecdotes about music's power side by side, without any particular consideration of their era, provenance or likelihood.

If Buno and Printz give us a plausible view of how Bach would have been brought up to conceive of human history, there are during his lifetime intimations as to how thought about the past could be developed into a more dynamic process. Printz, writing in 1690, clearly laid no premium on original historical facts; following the recent destruction of his library by fire, he notes that his study does not borrow from as many sources as it should and relies on only a few accessible authors, such as Kircher.⁴⁹ Extensive borrowing from respected authorities therefore seems to be an

⁴⁷ Buno, *Idea historiae universalis*, Introduction.

⁴⁸ Wolfgang Caspar Printz, *Historische Beschreibung der edele Sing- und Kling-Kunst* (Dresden, 1690), pp. 4–14.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Introduction.

index of quality for Printz.⁵⁰ However, things were clearly rather different a few decades later, as vividly exemplified in the controversy surrounding Johann Heinrich Zedler's forthcoming *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon* in 1730–2.⁵¹ Caspar Fritsch complained that Zedler would necessarily have to plagiarize the general history lexicon of his father, Thomas Fritsch, while Zedler's arguments moved from assuming that existing knowledge was public property towards proposing that his team of new authors would produce their own material, without the danger of plagiarism. What this suggests, then, is that there was during Bach's lifetime a move from viewing history as a world of similarities to one of differences, one in which the work of individual scholars could reveal insights that were entirely contrary to those of established authorities. There is also the sense that each scholar might see different things in the past, depending on his particular perspective.

This change was not something that suddenly occurred; it was latent in much recent European history. The Renaissance itself was, after all, predicated on a desire to characterize the present as the correction of a perceived imperfection in the recent past by using the model of a more perfect antiquity. This atmosphere of optimism and renewal was also accompanied by the growing sense that human history no longer cohered so strongly with the natural history of the world, such as in the way still depicted by Buno. Indeed, if Shakespeare's *Henry IV* (c. 1600) – speaking soon after his triumph at dethroning Richard – is anything to go by, there was a growing modern awareness of the temporal abyss of time, against which the local delinquency of politics and monarchy is thrown into absurd relief. *Henry* suggests that we have to make ourselves positively blind to the natural revolution of world time in order to keep ourselves from despair.⁵² In other words, our conception of history has necessarily to take on the quality of a localized fiction.

⁵⁰ On the persistence of the notion of venerating past authorities at the expense of originality, see John Butt, 'The Seventeenth-century Musical "Work"', in Tim Carter and John Butt (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-century Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 27–54, esp. pp. 41–5. See also John Butt, 'Bach e Händel: differenze entro una comune cultura dell'invenzione musicale', in *Enciclopedia della musica* (Einaudi), vol. 4, *Storia della musica europea*, ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, with Margaret Bent, Rossana Dalmonte and Mario Baroni (Turin: Einaudi, 2004), pp. 528–51.

⁵¹ For a useful summary, see http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Heinrich_Zedler.

⁵² *Henry IV*, Part 2, III. i: 'O God, that one might read the book of fate, And see the revolution of the times Make mountains level, and the continent, Weary of solid firmness, melt itself Into the sea . . . O, if this were seen, The happiest youth, viewing his progress through, What perils past, what crosses to ensue, Would shut the book, and sit him down and die.' See Sypher, *The Ethic of Time*, pp. 33–4, and also John Kerrigan, ed., *William Shakespeare – The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint* (London: Viking, 1986/1995), Introduction, p. 34: 'the sixteenth century saw a dislocation in man's sense of himself and the world so massive that

Something of the Elizabethan terror in the face of time must have lain in the increasing move from a division of time according to year, season, bells and hourglasses to one based on the increasingly precise and mechanical divisions of time afforded by clockwork. To a culture grounded in the cyclic rhythms of the medieval year, this new, objective form of measurement made the inexorable passing of time brutally clear.⁵³ Yet this fear of time and the sense of infinite regress engendered by the comparison of human history with the abyss of cosmic time could soon be mollified by taking heart in the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. Now at last a world arose in which actual material progress was possible; now time could be seen to be on the side of those with a progressive mentality. By throwing aside the assumed certainties of past authority, natural philosophers could open up entirely new areas of knowledge that radically altered the human hold on the world and promised much more in the future. This belief in rational progress, coupled with the notion that the individual could develop and prosper within an increasingly capitalized and industrialized economy, meant that the linear conception of time, already latent in Christian practice, became the primary form for the modern world. Charles Taylor articulates the transition from a pre-modern to a modern sense of time as from one that is multidimensional – where profane, everyday time is surrounded by, or penetrated by, a higher time of eternity (or of foundational acts, in ‘a time of origins’ in the past) – towards the single dimension of profane time.⁵⁴ In the seventeenth century, I might add, the multidimensional aspect of time is reworked as a contrast between ongoing clock time and the various temporalities of possible and actual subjectivities.

Bach's Passions clearly imply a model of the relationship between past and present, eternity and change, that resonates with this richly textured interplay of historical conceptions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Passions surely imply something well beyond the standard undifferentiated views of history with which Bach was raised. However, they lie equally far from the rationalized objective view of reality that modern sciences were beginning to promote. Recurrences in the music can colour the Passion story with a sense of inevitability, yet the fact that the

arguably nothing like it has been seen again until, in this century, man discovered that he had the power to destroy not only himself but “the great globe itself”.

⁵³ See Kerrigan, *William Shakespeare*, Introduction, pp. 33–5; see also Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 43–52.

⁵⁴ *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 97–8, 106.

two Passion settings do this in different ways could suggest that the past can be seen from different angles.

If we were to look for a parallel to this conception of the past in the historiography of Bach's age, the nearest would surely be the *New Science* (*Scienza nuova*) of 1725–44, by Giambattista Vico. Like Bach, Vico combines a highly conservative religious outlook with some surprisingly modern methods, advocating a history derived from actual human developments and differences rather than abstract sameness. He tries to account for much of what he perceives as lying in the fact of providence, which establishes universal and eternal orders in the world while at the same time showing that human history can betray many local historical differences.⁵⁵ Moreover, different races and countries, even if subject to the same laws of development and decline, will not necessarily all be at the same point in their respective cycles. Thus civilization, although never static, does not develop in a direct linear, progressive process, and, indeed, decline is just as possible as progress. While the first version of the *New Science* holds fast to the notion that it might be possible to maintain nations at the acme of their progress, contributing to the overall perfection of the human condition,⁵⁶ Vico ultimately feared the inevitable decline of the civilization in which he lived. In the last issue of the *New Science*, Vico introduces the tantalizing concept of *ricorso*, by which a nation can go through precisely the same cycle again in a new historical form and manifestation. This was all something Vico derived from his study of the rise and fall of the Roman empire, seeing a new *corso* arising out of the barbarism of the Middle Ages and perhaps soon to decline yet again (through excessive reliance on reason, according to Vico's view of his contemporary rationalist climate).⁵⁷

Most insightful in Vico's outlook is the view of myth as a 'true fiction' of human reality, 'true fiction' being a concept to which I have repeatedly returned (see pp. 23 and 47). He is situated between those who adopted an entirely uncritical view of knowledge from the past and those who swept aside all that was inherited as tradition (e.g. Descartes's view of myth in *Discourse on the Method*). Vico believed that myth represented the important 'poetic' side of the human condition, something apart from the rational, that expressed the realities of human needs and aims, even if

⁵⁵ Giambattista Vico, *New Science*, trans. David Marsh with an introduction by Anthony Grafton (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 126–7.

⁵⁶ Mark Lilla, *G. B. Vico – The Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 226.

⁵⁷ Vico, *New Science*, pp. 461–4.

inherited from an archaic civilization.⁵⁸ He understood that a figure such as Homer might never have existed, but also that 'we seem compelled to posit a sort of halfway existence and to say that Homer was an idea or *heroic archetype of the Greeks who recounted their history in song*'.⁵⁹ Of course, Vico's view of myth was not meant to be applied to the revealed truth of the Judeo-Christian tradition (although nothing in his methodology necessarily prevented this), but rather to pagan antiquity and to the necessary fictions that lay behind Roman jurisprudence, all of which form the greatest focus of his history.⁶⁰ In all, his was an anti-modern crusade against the freedom of thought brought by modern philosophy, but by historicizing the supposed eternal rules of human reason, the implications of his endeavours were later to be seen as curiously prescient.⁶¹

This consideration of Vico is not, of course, meant to suggest that Bach somehow could have read his writings or even directly shared his views of the past and its relation to the present (indeed, Vico was hardly read beyond Italy). Rather it is to provide a sort of parallel for the way it was possible for a composer with what was doubtless a deeply traditional outlook to present such powerfully nuanced interpretations of an archetypal story from the past and realize this in two different ways in the present. Bach's intentions were undoubtedly purely and unexceptionally Christian, but what shows beyond their obvious Christian significance is his ability to revivify a central myth of human history, specifically through a subtle balance of different forms of temporal patterning and an uncanny manipulation of recurring elements. Bach's Passions resonate beyond the specifically Christian context through the way they contribute to the powerful concept of 'true fiction' within modernity.

What to Bach was a historical certainty – the story of Jesus' Passion, together with its spiritual implications – is brought alive through the specific 'fiction' of the music. Just as a modern historian has to bring fictional elements to any history (e.g. linking traces from the past in a specific emplotment, making assumptions about motives of past actors, embellishing surviving data with rhetorical figures, applying a level of analytical imagination), Bach inflects every element of the story with musical means. From this point of view, earlier forms of musical Passions, such as those that were chanted or sung in continuous polyphony, are

⁵⁸ Joseph Mali, *The Rehabilitation of Myth – Vico's 'New Science'* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 3–4, 82, 86–8.

⁵⁹ Vico, *New Science*, p. 381.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 454–5.

⁶¹ Lilla, G. B. Vico, pp. 233–4.

essentially 'non-fictional' since their relation to the text is both consistent and uninflected. The parallel with Buno's uninflected history of the world is surely telling here. What is crucially absent in the pre-modern conception of history is the sense of 'seeing-as', the 'way the imaginary is incorporated into the intended having-been, without weakening the "realist" aspect of this intention'.⁶²

History thus becomes dynamic in its modern sense when its essential difference with the present is acknowledged and fundamentally fictional means are used to bring it alive, giving it a charge that can affect and transform us in the present. After all, the past cannot be conceived 'as it actually was' without the action of the imagination. Primary among the techniques that history borrows from fiction is the means by which time is reconfigured.⁶³ Such reconfiguring of time is surely something that music shares with both fiction and history. Bach would doubtless have applied the same musical means in narrating a story, whether he saw it as sacred truth, mythology or pure fiction. Just as we might not necessarily be able to discern the dividing line between history and imaginative literature without researching thoroughly the sources of the story (or without knowing something about the background of the author), the same would be true of our listening to Bach's Passions. To make them vehicles of a story that is necessarily true requires the application of a specific faith on the part of the listener. No music can, on its own, cause a listener to gain a faith or sense of truth, but it can certainly help us exercise the means by which we might become sensitive to such possibilities. Primary among these means might be the way music can manipulate and develop our sense of consciousness over time.

Subjective time

As Eric Chafe has noted, Bach and his librettist for the Matthew Passion were almost certainly working within a familiar tradition of Lutheran meditation, in which the exercise is designed to effect a real change of state – this was clearly something strongly evident in the sermon tradition, which, as we know from Elke Axmacher, lay closely behind Picander's Matthew libretto.⁶⁴ In other words, Lutheranism specifically encouraged

⁶² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, p. 181. ⁶³ *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 100–1, 181.

⁶⁴ Chafe, *Tonal Allegory*, pp. 135–7, 346–59; Elke Axmacher, 'Ein Quellenfund zum Text der Matthäus-Passion', *Bjb* 64 (1978), 181–91.

personal change and development in order to enhance the faith of each individual, developing a personal eschatological urgency in the present.⁶⁵

For music to have the potential to enhance consciousness (in order to render the suitably predisposed listener amenable to developing faith), it would have to relate in some way to the constitution of subjective identity in time. I will leave it open as to whether or not there is a fundamental or essential human form of consciousness in time, but I will assume that developments in the understanding of such consciousness in the Western tradition reflect both some form of progress in knowledge and specific changes in cultural disposition. The concepts both of 'progress in knowledge' and of a 'specific cultural disposition' relate directly to my core questions about modernity (which is the 'specific cultural disposition' in which 'progress in knowledge' became a reality).

Absolutely central to the study of pre-modern subjective time is the remarkably acute discussion that Augustine provides in his *Confessions*. Augustine longed for an experience of eternity that would transcend the continuum of earthly time and he claimed to have achieved this just once, in the company of his late mother. He was aware of time drifting past in steady, measurable increments, but remained puzzled by the way in which his conscious identity persisted across this continuum as if that present itself was without duration.⁶⁶ Was there a way of providing the earth-bound soul with some degree of temporal grounding? Augustine's ingenious solution was to suggest that past, present and future can only really exist in the mind as the present of past things (memory), the present of present things (direct perception) and the present of future things (expectations). He used the example of reciting a psalm (something that could easily be a musical recitation, too) by which the expected future steadily passes into the past as the point of reading moves forwards. He overcomes the problem of the pinpoint subjectivity of the present (i.e. the fact that our consciousness at any particular moment is gone as soon as it comes) by noting the persistence of the mind's attention and how it is through this that what is expected passes into the memory. Before beginning a psalm, his faculty of expectation engages the whole, but, as he begins to recite, this future expectation pours through the consciousness into the memory (perhaps rather like the sand in an egg-timer). From the experience of reciting a psalm, Augustine abstracts the way we encounter both small durations and longer ones, including life itself and the whole history of

⁶⁵ For a stimulating discussion of the role of music in the Lutheran 'art of dying', see David Yearsley, *Bach and the Meanings of Counterpoint* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1–41.

⁶⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, pp. 119–25.

mankind. There is certainly the implication that the exercise in distending the soul through broadening the individual moment, with its expectations and retentions, can enable us to direct ourselves towards eternity; there is the future hope of bringing the mind into a state of stillness, through our attention to the eternal Word.⁶⁷ Music, in this sort of consciousness, may help attune us to a greater reality that is entirely pre-given and to which the state of attention aligns us.

Although the scientific revolution and the rise of rationalism in the seventeenth century did much to render Augustine's viewpoints archaic, particularly his opinion of the world as essentially flawed and irredeemable, his speculations on subjective time remained undeveloped. Andrew Bowie suggests that a new emphasis on the role of music in delineating the time and subjectivity of the listener might be evident in Descartes's early treatise *Compendium Musicae* (1618), when the philosopher suggests that hearing the end of a song reminds us of its beginning and of what happened in between.⁶⁸ While this might not represent more than an adaptation of the Augustinian view specifically to music, it may well be that the increasing formal structuring of music in the seventeenth century betrays a more acute conception of the development of individual consciousness in time than is evident in other areas of thought. Indeed, with the increasingly mechanistic model of the human body and its resulting consciousness, the notion of subjective time may actually have receded in importance. The most public study of time in Bach's environment, the entry on 'Zeit' in Zedler's *Lexicon*,⁶⁹ shows little development of the concept of subjective time. Outer time is essentially cosmological, marked by the movement of stars, and is then simply further divided into the standard human measurements of time. This is presented within the concept of the so-called 'Leibniz-Wolffian' view of time, a mechanistic formula by which one thing simply and regularly succeeds another. We might well conclude that the highest ideal of time within this conception was the perfection and regulation of the clock mechanism. This mechanistic attitude tends to reaffirm the traditional, essentially cyclical, view of time, which the human enters and leaves as if joining and alighting from a carousel. Right from the start, the Zedler entry stresses that our inner sense of time is of our continually 'abweichendes und wiederkommendes Nun' ('changing and recurring Now') in which the present

⁶⁷ See Ricoeur's discussion of Augustine, in *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, esp. pp. 29–30.

⁶⁸ Andrew Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 52.

⁶⁹ Zedler, *Lexicon*, vol. 61, columns 725–858.

goes past so quickly that it is virtually inconceivable. The nature of our understanding is such that we can peg the cumulative duration of our inner *Nun* to the regular and measurable progress of outer, cosmological time.

Zedler's article pours scorn on Augustine's famous mystification by which he states that he can understand time perfectly until anyone actually asks him to explain it. It is, rather, simply a matter of measuring the inner duration against the outer, and of understanding precisely the different meanings of time.⁷⁰ Time in its inner sense is the duration of a thing, as defined by its beginning and ending (so far, this follows the sense of Augustine's psalm recitation). Our life is like a stream made out of many small droplets, or a line made out of countless points, but with the difference that once each point or drop has gone, it has gone for good (unlike the remembered part of Augustine's psalm). Therefore, each moment that passes is a shortening of what remains of our duration. All this leads to the moralizing conclusion that one should use the time at one's disposal well, following God's will and practising due diligence. And, given that we are powerless to retain and control an instant, whether past, present or future, we need to surrender all to the will of God. As Augustine put it, the Word of God tells all things 'here is your beginning and here your end'.⁷¹ The moralizing approach to the use of time already had a long history, particularly within Protestantism, for which the 'saving' of time and the saving of money were often equated with the saving of the soul and the avoidance of waste.⁷² Much of this resonates with the impression we gain from the texts of Bach's church music, according to which one should foster the best hope of salvation through faith within the limited and unpredictable time still available.⁷³

Interestingly, the authors of Zedler note that few people are actually interested in the nature of time; mostly, people just follow the business of their lives, one day following after another. The majority see time as merely that in which all things in the world are situated, as a current that carries everything along, and without realizing that it is time that gives each of us our allotted duration and entire existence.

Is this picture of the natural-theological conception of time in Bach's environment the richest available for its time? Confining the enquiry to purely theological and philosophical accounts might obscure the way in which specifically artistic modes of thought could give us insights that are

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, column 729. ⁷¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 29. ⁷² Kerrigan, Introduction, p. 36.

⁷³ This is a feature of Bach's cantatas from his very earliest years, such as the 'Actus Tragicus' – Cantata 106, 'Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit' – or the colourful clock-imagery of 'Komm, du süße Todesstunde', Cantata 161.

not otherwise available or even conceivable. For instance, it is undoubtedly Shakespeare who offers us the most striking number of perspectives on time from an unequivocally early modern perspective, one that seems to recognize the contingency of human subjectivity and the unavoidable contradictions that different cultures and perspectives bring. One of the most vivid pictures of the way in which time proceeds at vastly different speeds for different people is found in the dialogue between Rosalind and Orlando in *As You Like It*, III.ii: time trots hard for the 'young maid between the contract of her marriage and the day it is solemniz'd'; time ambles for the priest who lacks the learning to study or the rich man without gout, who feels no pain; time gallops for the thief condemned to the gallows while it is virtually stationary for the lawyers in the vacation, 'for they sleep between term and term, and then they perceive not how Time moves'. If one were to identify the types of time to be found in the texts of Bach's church music with some of these, they might lie somewhere between the 'bride's time', the optimistic expectation of ultimate union with Christ, and 'gallows time', the fear that one's life might end at any moment and the belief that the faith necessary for salvation is of the most urgent concern. But the Shakespearean concept of different types and tempi of personal human time obviously cannot tell us anything about the specific contribution that music might make to the way subjective time could operate, independently of (or at least in excess of) text. Can music capitalize on the malleability of human time perception that Shakespeare so acutely observes?

Certainly the conventions of *opera seria* as they coalesced towards the end of the seventeenth century provide two distinct types of musical time: secco recitative, which presents a linear narrative flow to animate a drama from the past in the parallel time of the present, without normally intending to draw attention to the disparity between the two; and aria (often da capo), which encapsulates a mood, feeling or emotion by drastically slowing down the narrative time and approaching more the notion of cyclic time. Aria time presents in effect its own 'world' complete with its own orbit (to the degree that it follows da capo principles), and smaller cycles too, if it involves ritornello elements. The extent to which later generations found this constant stopping and starting of 'natural' recitative time frustrating is perhaps a reflection of the growing importance of linear, progressive time, or at least of a time that delivers the resolution of a specific goal. The choruses that Bach built on poetic texts (even those opening and closing the two Passions) can be classed as 'arias' in terms of their function (and are sometimes labelled as such in surviving

libretti),⁷⁴ while those representing the disciples, priests or crowd ('turba') are essentially part of the recitative function. Nevertheless, the fact that Bach uses the same forces for all choruses, regardless of function (together with several combinations of single or duetting voices with a chorus), means that the division between recitative time and aria time is sometimes blurred. Moreover, given that the Evangelist's recitation is not an event in the past but a (third-person) narration in the present, thus bringing the past to presence, there is a sense in which all elements relate more strongly to the present of the performance than they would in the case of standard *opera seria*.

Those who devised the concept of the Baroque aria within a broader dramatic manifold were perhaps intuiting something crucial about how modern subjective consciousness could be constituted. It was Edmund Husserl (nearly two hundred years after Bach) who was the first to develop Augustine's sense of the past and future as somehow inhering in the present, by suggesting that every present moment is accompanied by a 'halo' of retentions from the past and protentions into the future. As each 'now' passes, retentions from previous pasts are passed down a line similar to the way tiling on a roof coheres (until they fade away entirely). Husserl's primary example of how this might work is the perception of melody, by which our sense of the whole is continuously perceived in every moment of its course (as a sequence of protentions and retentions). At every point of perception a protention is fulfilled (or modified if the unexpected occurs) and as each becomes a retention, it becomes the memory of fulfilled (or modified) protentions rather than of specific sensations. What is significant is that subjective time consciousness, as it has developed within modernity, is a synthesizing act, one that brings to consciousness the potential for meaning and coherence. While retention requires memory, this is to be distinguished from memory as recollection (which restages an entire manifold of retentions and protentions, an object or event from the past complete with its own 'halo', as it were). The tiling effect is then nested in the act of recollection (but clearly cut off from the time of our present consciousness). In all, then, retention is not the same as 'replay' since it involves a degree of persistence within the mind, which shades off into the past.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See Berger, *Bach's Cycle*, pp. 45–50.

⁷⁵ Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins, 1893–1917)*, trans. John Barnett Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991). The understanding of Husserl's sequence of retentions as a form of 'tiling', I borrow from Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, p. 133.

Given that Husserl derived the core of his theory through the contemplation of melody, it may well be that the development of music in modernity played its part in both the development and the articulation of more 'modern' forms of time consciousness. It is certainly striking that Henri Bergson's thoughts on time as indivisible duration, from around the same period as Husserl's work, also use music as an important example. He suggests that if we listen to melody, unmediated by its representation in spatial forms (e.g. in notation or on a keyboard), it becomes pure duration 'undivided and indivisible'. Likewise our entire conscious life is an inner duration akin to melody; if our attention turns away from it we might imagine that it is divisible, but what is divisible is only the space used to represent it (like a blade passing through flame), 'we are dividing the unfolded, not the unfolding'.⁷⁶ If, then, music becomes such an important way of understanding time consciousness by the early twentieth century, it is likely not only that these authors had themselves learned much from hearing music, but that composers and performers had, from the musical side, particular insights into the way human consciousness works.

While the recitative mode comes close to 'everyday' time consciousness in its flow of time seemingly pegged to the objective passing of time (conforming to the traditional 'unity' of time), the aria focuses more specifically on the phenomenon of time consciousness. With its representation of a specific mood or character, with or without a contrasting central section, the listener builds up a sequence of retentions and protentions that belong to what can be synthesized as a single manifold. The aria exercises the disciplines of time consciousness with musical suggestions of retentions and protentions. Listening to music of this kind might serve to reformat our sense of subjective presence in time (something that normally has an indefinite span, often relatively short), so that a particular form of consciousness is 'invited' to last for the specific duration of the music. This might be an example of the way music can work over and above whatever might be implicit in a verbal text (which can be read in an indeterminate amount of time), exercising our sense of extended temporality.

This effect is enhanced rather than subverted by the continual alternation of arias with recitative, since the exercise of aria consciousness might give us the potential to deepen the 'halo' of protentions and retentions in

⁷⁶ Henri Bergson, *Key Writings*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 208.

the more 'normal' time flow of recitatives. With this in mind, it is possible to see how a genre like the oratorio Passion could be viewed as a vehicle for deepening faith and drawing attention to the theological possibilities latent in scriptural narrative. Musical composition and performance, in turn, clearly benefited from the development of a more individualized approach to the cultivation of faith. But it is equally clear that the compositional mechanism, however much born of spiritual practice, could work independently of any theological or dogmatic intentions.

The late Baroque aria might develop subjective time in ways that are somewhat different from later musical styles. As Berger stresses (drawing on a major insight from Laurence Dreyfus), the essence of Bach's extended pieces lies in their richness of 'invention' rather than their disposition as such. In other words, it is Bach's exploration of the possibilities in the basic material (such as a ritornello or a fugal complex of subject and countersubjects) that gives this music its sense of intensity; the precise order of events is only secondary. Music of the later eighteenth century and indeed of much of the nineteenth century invests far more in the sequence of events, the order in which we hear the music over time (and its disposition or confirmation/subversion of an established form). Although I will try to show that the order of events in Bach's music is perhaps rather more significant than this model might initially suggest (see [Chapter 5](#)), the notion of invention as the primary generator of the music has important implications for the listener's time consciousness. For, in deviating somewhat from the linearity of consciousness implied by Husserl's model of subjective time (by which we move forward in time through the music, passing our expectations through our present experience into the retentions from the past), this sort of music often covers the same ground repeatedly, in a sequence of variations or permutations that might alter the order of voices, the key, mode or degree of completeness. Although such music still presupposes a forward progression of consciousness, this is a consciousness that retains something of the cyclical model of time. The consciousness might have its protentions and retentions, but there is also a sense of the listener's 'now' as standing in the middle of the musical duration, with the variations, repetitions and confirmations of the material adding to a deepening of this position, as if time fans out in concentric circles around us. Everything we hear, once the essential inventive complex begins to emerge, can work as both protention and retention simultaneously, confirming or modifying past and future. In other words, the 'pre-modern' type of time, and the consciousness this exercises, might be

implicit in Bach's music on at least an equal footing with more modern, linear conceptions.

Within the Lutheran oratorio Passion tradition, there is, beyond the recitative and aria, a further regular element with temporal implications: the chorale verses inserted at particular points in the narrative. These might evoke a shared sense of the present, since they are so directly bound to the culture of congregational singing (whether or not such chorales within the Passions are sung by all, or just by the specialist singers). However foreign or operatic Bach's dramatic narrative and intensely expressive arias might have sounded to the Leipzig congregations, the chorales would have provided an immediate cultural frame of reference, a stylized sense of passing time together by singing familiar verses and melodies. Each would have had its predictable beginning and ending, together with a sense of progress through the melody and the potential array of stanzas. This would remind the listener of the function of liturgical time, a more or less predictable sequence of events that, like the aria, abstracts one from 'ordinary' time, but brings with it a specific sense of shared experience. This shared experience had been particularly emphasized (perhaps even inaugurated) within the Lutheran tradition, by which congregational singing was of crucial significance in the consolidation of doctrinal points and in the political solidarity of the new confession.

If the repetitions of chorale melodies give the sense of an ongoing liturgical (and communal) present, this is one that is interrupted by the narrative (in other respects it is rather the chorales that interrupt the narrative). Given that much of the sequence of chorales will be perceived in retrospect, as one remembers and amasses past verses, there is the possibility that repeated chorale melodies provoke a growing retention and extension backwards of the immediate past, working in the opposite direction to the forward thrust of the narrative. The arias – by exercising individual time consciousness in a slower, often concentrically elaborated present – might serve to render the listener more alert to the other two types of time: the narrative (moving relentlessly forwards in time) and the communal (fanning out backwards, in terms of the gradual amassing of verses, and also in the way it might evoke the 'local', 200-year-old tradition of the Lutheran confession).

Bach includes another element, namely, the 'arioso' or (as it is titled in the Matthew Passion) 'recitativo', which precedes the majority (nine) of the Matthew Passion arias and two of those in the John Passion. In temporal terms many of these seem to serve a sort of 'braking' function, their repetitive and often circular figuration halting the sense of relentless

objective time found in the secco recitative. Quite often they seem purposely to slow time down by adopting the sort of repetition that implied cyclic time in the first chorus of the John Passion (see p. 101). 'Betrachte, meine Seel' (its text so obviously a call to meditation) in the John Passion (19) adopts an extremely slow harmonic rhythm, contrasting with the scourging scene immediately before; the figuration in the lute (played by the organ or harpsichord in later performances), although not literally repetitive, gives the impression of an ostinato. The piece seems cyclic, rounded out by the recurrence of the first two bars at the conclusion. The ariosos in the Matthew Passion are similar in their repetitive figuration and slow harmonic rhythm, but generally these are less rounded than 'Betrachte, meine Seel', often modulating to the key of the succeeding aria. They seem to have both a 'braking' function and also a 'breaking' one, in the sense that the listener's present 'breaks into' the plane of the historical biblical events.⁷⁷

If virtually all the elements of Bach's Passions have strong precedents in recent Passion composition, what makes his particularly striking is the way the temporal elements are combined and especially the way one gives way to another. Most obvious in this respect is the way Bach places chorales, their text often working in confirmation of or antithesis to what has just happened in the narrative. The first chorale of the John Passion, 'O große Lieb' (3), comes just after the point at which Jesus tells those arresting him to let the disciplines go free, thus emphasizing the love by which he dies on their behalf; a little later, the chorale 'Dein Will gescheh' (5), a Lutheran paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer, follows Jesus' statement that he will not turn away from the cup that his father has given him. Obviously, these semantic connections have nothing in themselves to do with time (or indeed music), but they enhance the sort of focus that the cultural present of the chorale brings, making that presence much more real as it cuts in upon the narrated past. This juxtaposition is made doubly striking when the narrative before has been particularly charged. Perhaps the most celebrated instance of this is in the Matthew Passion, when each of the disciples asks whether he is the one who will betray Jesus ('Herr, bin ichs?'), which runs directly into the chorale 'Ich bins, ich sollte büßen' (9e–10), the inversion of the words focusing directly on the guilt of the believer in the present, all potentially taking the role of Judas.

While virtually all the chorales break in upon the biblical narrative, two instead follow arias: these are 'Petrus, der nicht denkt zurück' (14) after

⁷⁷ My thanks to Ruth HaCohen for this analogy between 'breaking' and 'braking'.

the aria 'Ach, mein Sinn' (or its 1725 substitute, 'Zerschmettert mich, ihr Felsen und ihr Hügel') in the John Passion and 'Bin ich gleich von dir gewichen' (40) following 'Erbarme dich' in the Matthew Passion. These two exceptional instances follow directly on the arias relating to the narrative of Peter's weakness and threefold denial, giving a doubled focus to the notion of human failure, first stylized in the subjective 'world' of the aria and then rendered immediate and communal in the chorale. This irregularity in the established pattern for chorales serves to focus on the urgency of the cultural present, the respective aria having exercised the individual sense of time consciousness, synthesized into a specific emotional manifold relating to guilt or agitation.

In two instances, the difference between the type of time evoked by the chorale and the type evoked by the aria or arioso is thrown into particular relief. In the John Passion, the chorale verse 'Jesu, der du warest tot' is interleaved with the bass aria 'Mein teurer Heiland' (32). The effect is to suggest the way an individual's meditation can combine with a communal practice in the present. But given the large temporal intervals separating each line of the chorale, there is also a strong sense that the chorale occurs at a slower pace than normal (particularly given that another verse of the same chorale, 'Er nahm alles wohl in acht', 28, was sung just a few minutes before). To the listener, then, there might be the feeling that we are participating in a cultural present, but one in which time has been slowed down by the more individualistic subjectivity of the solo bass line. It is as if Bach is trying to bring the development of subjective time consciousness and the communal experience of the present closer together.

In the arioso ('recitativo') 'O Schmerz! hier zittert das gequälte Herz' (19) from the Matthew Passion, the agonized musings of the solo tenor are interdispersed with the lines of the chorale verse 'Was ist die Ursach aller solcher Plagen?' Here the contrast between the two elements is much more striking than in 'Mein teurer Heiland', and they are separated in alternating sequence rather than performed simultaneously. The tenor's text encapsulates the sense of terror and fear that Jesus must have felt, suffering for a 'foreign crime' ('fremden Raub'), but, given that this is sung by the tenor (in the part labelled 'Evangelista') rather than the bass (who, in Bach's scoring, took the role of Jesus), there also arises the notion of the individual experiencing a terror sympathetic to that of the human Jesus. The chorale lines, cutting in with a simpler texture between the agitated tenor utterances, draw attention to the fact that it is the guilty believer who is responsible for all this sorrow, and that Jesus is suffering in order to atone for original sin. The interruptions that each alternation of the two

elements brings encourage an emotional alternation between blind terror and the recognition of guilt (i.e. original sin, in the scriptural tradition), between a private, inarticulate experience and a recognizable piece of dogma, equally personal in impact, but articulated within the communal texture of the chorale. Theological content aside, the splicing brings an obvious sense of the way in which a traditional, communal element has been defamiliarized by the agitated arioso ('recitativo'); our protentions are consequently modified and pass into retentions that are very different from those relating to the 'normal' fulfilment of protentions. The type of temporal contrast habitually brought by the arrival of a chorale after a significant event in the story is now multiplied – on a line-by-line basis – by the number of alternations between arioso and chorale.

Although arias tend to present the most rounded form of time of the various musical genres available, slowing down our 'ordinary' consciousness of time, this slower consciousness is not without its own tempo. Highly agitated arias, such as 'Ach, mein Sinn' (JP 13) and 'Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder' (MP 42) flow past at a striking rate. In the latter, the opening ritornello with its spectacular violin obbligato seems to encapsulate the singer's desperate plea that Jesus be released in return for the blood money. The insistent repetitions of the opening of the ritornello (heard complete at the beginning and end) tend to reinforce this impression, as do the frequent extensions of its sequential material. Both the plea and the thought that goes with it are repeated in such a way as to suggest an obsessive state of relatively short duration. The procedure in 'Ach, mein Sinn' is more complex: here, every bar of the instrumental parts, excepting the three-bar epilogue, is derived from the opening ritornello.⁷⁸ From this point of view, the music is entirely controlled, every event foreordained in the opening sixteen bars (greatly enhancing what I term the concentric form of time consciousness). Yet the text is concerned entirely with the singer's agitation in the wake of denying his Lord, asking where his conscience will lead and finding no counsel in heart or world. This is one of the few aria texts in Bach's Passions that has no return to its opening lines, so it comes closest to a linear stream of consciousness. The melodic line is equally irregular, its only direct references to the melodic content of the ritornello being in its first seven bars and in a very fragmentary reference in bb. 63–6 (see p. 81). Thereafter it tends to ignore returns of the ritornello (e.g. bb. 32, 52 and especially the beginning of the final, complete ritornello at b. 74).

⁷⁸ See p. 81, and Laurence Dreyfus, 'Bachian Poetics in the *St John Passion*' (forthcoming article).

It may well be that the references in the text to the singer searching his conscience, heart and worldly counsel gave Bach the idea of musically invoking different levels of consciousness across time. The texted line functions like the undisciplined consciousness in the linear present, going through a sequence of non-recursive thoughts (albeit thoughts that are underlined by local text repetition, just as one's passing thoughts might be extended for a short time). The operation of protentions/retentions is reduced to its most minimal workings, as if to imply the potential annihilation of any consciousness whatever. The ritornello structure simultaneously reminds us that our consciousness can be grounded and unified in time. Focusing on the varied repetitions can enhance our time consciousness in its concentric mode, to a degree beyond any other aria in the Passions.

The two arias just considered relate in their various ways to different levels of time and consciousness within agitated states. At the other end of the scale are arias like 'Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben' (MP 49) which imply the slowing-down of the sense of time and might even take one into a different consciousness of time altogether. The deceleration from the chorus's call for crucifixion ('Laß ihn kreuzigen!', 45b) is effected in virtually every way available: the chorus is immediately followed by the chorale 'Wie wunderbarlich ist doch diese Strafe' (46), next by Pilate's doleful question as to what evil Jesus has done (47), and then by the arioso 'Er hat uns allen wohlgetan' (48, the last-minute drop flatwards, from E minor to C major, furthering the sense of deceleration, or at least repose). The other end of the aria returns us to the bloodthirsty action, with the repeat of the 'Laß ihn kreuzigen!', now transposed up a tone, a much more sudden transformation than that preceding the aria, and retrospectively drawing even greater attention to its antithetical status. What immediately distinguishes this aria (from all but 'So ist mein Jesus nun gefangen', 27a in Part 1) is the lack of a bass line in the normal range of the continuo. The bottom line (provided by oboe da caccia 2) is slow-moving and largely in crotchets, so the immediate impression is one of weightlessness, lacking the obvious sense of forward motion provided by a conventional continuo bass line. The aria evokes another world, one that is easily assimilated to the notions of Jesus' supreme love, his innocence and the consequent cancelling of the eternity of original sin ('das ewige Verderben') and punishment. The sense comes close to Jesus' role in overcoming eternal human damnation in the John Passion, but with much more emphasis on the humanly conceivable concept of his love. Like Augustine's

famous vision of eternity,⁷⁹ the music leads us away from the brutality of the action towards a duration of seemingly timeless repose (appropriately encased by identical ritornelli) and then back, brutally, into the action. The experience of Bach's aria could encourage us to conceptualize the overcoming of hatefulness through love but, more fundamentally, the very time it consumes alters our relation to the vivid immediacy of the action once the latter is resumed.

The notion of music articulating a level of love beyond that which can be experienced in normal human life could suggest a redemptive role for art in general. In Shakespeare's Sonnet 19 the speaker accepts that time will destroy the beauty of his lover, but concludes by proclaiming the defeat of time by art: 'Yet do thy worst, old Time; despite thy wrong, My love shall in my verse ever live young'. The final line seems to preserve both the memory of the poet's love as a person and also the act of love in itself; it has withstood the ravages of time.⁸⁰ The effect of performing a piece like 'Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben', particularly within the context of the surrounding movements, conjures up the idea of a sort of beauty that would otherwise decay, a beauty, like that evoked by Shakespeare, which itself seems to be the product of the effect the object of love has had on the lover (in this case, on the character implied by the singer). While many of Shakespeare's references to time allude to it as the great destroyer, in *The Winter's Tale* it takes on the role of a healer, the extraordinary gap that separates the two temporal halves of the play alluding to a process of reconciliation that could happen in no other way than by time's passing. Bach's 'Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben' might perform an analogous healing function, standing as it does in such immediate contrast to the intense drama that surrounds it. Yet its performance contributes even further to this effect by the way it stretches out the subjective time of the listener, an experience that a believer could easily assimilate to the sense of Jesus' love enduring beyond the violent contingencies of human existence (governed as these are by relentless chronological time).

If the ariosos and arias can be related to the distension of the Augustinian point of the subjective present, providing something of an exercise for the listener in prolonging a meditative state, there are several other ways in which the music might stimulate the development of a listener's consciousness in time. One simple means for this is the introduction of an interval or motive in the recitative that is subsequently taken up in an aria,

⁷⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 86.

⁸⁰ See Frederick Turner, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Time – Moral and Philosophical Themes in Some Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 20.

providing a link between the two temporal levels but also giving the listener the opportunity to cultivate a longer span of attention. Most obvious here would be the prominent minor sixths (the interval that Bach's distant cousin, J.G. Walther, would have termed 'exclamatio')⁸¹ relating to Peter's denial and the crowing cock in the Matthew Passion (38c, bb. 23–7), perhaps also heard in extended form as a diminished seventh (i.e. major sixth) during the representation of Peter's weeping (b. 32). Immediately following this comes the aria 'Erbarme dich' (39), which is based so prominently on the rising minor sixth (see [Example 2.3](#)).

There is no doubt something uncanny about this in relation to the unfolding of events: Peter knew that he was going to deny Christ three times, even if he had forgotten; his last denial is mimicked directly by the Evangelist's announcement of the cock crow, transposed up a fifth, as if the two were related as cause and effect.⁸² While we may notice that this is uncanny from Peter's point of view, we ourselves experience a similar sense of the uncanny with the opening of the aria. We realize that we already know this gesture; we have carried the experience of the interval in our present consciousness like Husserl's metaphor of the comet's tail. Bach might be playing on the way we habitually carry retentions from the immediate past into our present. These stand on the border between memory as a staged recollection and memory as the sequence of tiled retentions in the present. By encouraging us to blend recollection with our continuous consciousness, the music might suggest that our immediate retentive consciousness could potentially be extended back through our entire past.

Even more pervasive is the motivic connection between the next aria in the Matthew Passion and the recitative that precedes it. This aria represents Judas's regret and forms a close parallel with the representation of Peter's failure (it is surely no coincidence that both 'Erbarme dich' and, now, 'Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder' (42) use the same scoring, if – given the change from chorus 1 to chorus 2 – in mirror image).⁸³ As the priests

⁸¹ Johann Gottfried Walther, *Musicalisches Lexicon oder musikalische Bibliothek* (Leipzig, 1732), facsimile edition ed. Richard Schaal (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1953), p. 233; see also Bartel, *Musica Poetica*, p. 268.

⁸² Naomi Cumming suggests that the link between Peter's minor sixth and the Evangelist's suggests that Peter's agency is subsumed within that of the Evangelist: 'The Subjectivities of "Erbarme Dich"', *Music Analysis* 16/1 (1997), 5–44, esp. 19–20.

⁸³ In the earliest version of this Passion, the violin obbligato of the first aria, 39 (choir 1) was played by the first violin of choir 2, and that of the second, 42 (choir 2) by the first violin of choir 1. While many have taken this crosswise performance to be symbolic of the cross, Melamed notes that it probably derived from rather more practical matters, namely that in the first performance(s) Bach only had two violins in each orchestra, since his notional

22 Evangelist

Tenor

Bass

Peter

Evangelist

Continuo

Da hub er an, sich zu ver - flu - chen und zu schwö - ren Ich ken - ne des Men - schen nicht. Und

25

als - bald krä - he - te der Hahn. Da dach - te Pe - trus an die Wor - te Je - su, da

28

er zu ihm sag - te: E - he der Hahn krä - hen wird, wirst du mich drei - mal ver - leug - nen. Und

31

ging her - aus und wei - - - - - ne - te bit - ter - lich.

39. Aria

I

Vln solo

Vln I & II

Vla

Continuo

p sempre

pizzicato

Example 2.3 Matthew Passion, melodic relationships from recitative 38c, bb. 22–33, to aria 39 ‘Erbarme dich’, bb. 1–3

complement of four had to be divided between the two orchestras; therefore it made sense for the obligato (i.e. a third violin line, since the ‘normal’ two violins were still required to play their part in the accompanying texture) to be written into the part of whichever orchestra was not performing; *Hearing Bach's Passions*, pp. 61–2.

exclaim that they cannot put blood money into the temple coffers a dactylic motive becomes increasingly pervasive (*'figura corta'*, according to Walther),⁸⁴ which is immediately taken up by the aria (see p. 178). This effects an immediate enhancement of the connection between recitative time and aria time.

While these examples tend to work on the potential for an immediate retention of a gesture just heard, with little intervening material, there are also several examples of the same process working in an interrupted form. The depiction of the scourging of Christ in the John Passion, sung with a brutal dactylic motive in the recitative (18c, bb. 26–8), seems to prepare for the motive dominating the aria *'Erwäge, wie sein blutgefärbter Rücken'* (20), even though the arioso *'Betrachte, meine Seel'* (19) intervenes. Exactly the same sort of connection relates the institution of the Eucharist in the Matthew Passion (11, bb. 25, 27, 28 etc.) and the aria *'Ich will dir mein Herze schenken'* (13), which is also delayed by an intervening arioso (see [Example 2.4](#)).

This, of course, has the potent effect of suggesting how Jesus' institution of the Eucharist in the past is played again in the present, in the context of the immediate subjective presence of the aria. The music perhaps encourages us to believe that we can traverse entire millennia and experience a real presence that is authentic to the original. From this point of view, the temporary suspension of the motive is positively beneficial, engendering a sensation of uncanny remembrance a few minutes later. Bach seems to be capitalizing on the potential that music has for challenging 'the notion that past events are necessarily and irretrievably "distant"'.⁸⁵ Memory as a form of staged recollection is again brought closer to the concept of enhanced time consciousness.

Bach's technique here seems to come surprisingly close to Marcel Proust's concept of the uncanny memory, the sensation by which a simple experience (e.g. the madeleine dipped in tea, or uneven paving stones) suddenly takes one back into the past. The sequence of such experiences is an important stage in the narrator's quest to retain and preserve the past. Just as in Shakespeare's love preserved in verse, the fictional Marcel at last discovers that he can recover the past only by re-creating it within the work of art; this is the creative purpose for which his vivid flashes of memory have been preparing him all along. As Paul Ricoeur puts it, 'Time regained . . . in the sense of lost time revived, comes out of the fixing of

⁸⁴ Walther, *Musicalisches Lexicon*, p. 244; see also Bartel, *Musica Poetica*, p. 234.

⁸⁵ Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 61.

24

Vln I & II
Vla

Bass

Continuo

Jesus
Trin - - ket al - - - - le dar - aus;

26

das ist mein Blut des neu - en Te - sta - ments, wel - ches ver - gos - sen wird für

13. Aria

Oboe d'amore
I & II

Continuo

Example 2.4 Matthew Passion, melodic relationship from recitative 11, bb. 24–8, to aria 13, bb. 1–2

this fugitive, contemplative moment in a lasting work.⁸⁶ Bringing this line of modern thought back into line with Bach's Passions, we can see that these latter confer a degree of reality on the Gospel stories and on specific sacraments such as the Eucharist, a type of reality that is available through no other means. As Jeremy Begbie has suggested, experiencing a span of music might teach us that just because a thing or event does not exist now, this does not mean that it cannot exist at all; past and future moments belong to the same piece that we are hearing, they somehow exist elsewhere in the manifold of musical time and space.⁸⁷

The sense of recollection is particularly potent in the way choruses are reused in the John Passion. I have already discussed the symmetrical

⁸⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, p. 145.

⁸⁷ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, p. 66.

placing of similar choruses as part of the consideration of cyclic time. However, there is also the question of the recycling of the first turba choruses ('Jesum von Nazareth'), which are used five times in all. While many earlier commentators tended to view this recycling as evidence that Bach's heart was not in the project and that the John Passion was not such an original creation of genius as its sister,⁸⁸ later writers have sometimes seen this recycling in symbolic terms (such as the 'hidden' true nature of Jesus as the Christ, lying ironically behind whatever the crowd might be shouting to the contrary).⁸⁹ Whether or not such ironic meaning was ever intended, the main effect on the listener is surely one of uncanny premonition. The characteristic cycle of fifths and imperfect (or 'Phrygian') cadence rounds off the second chorus in Part 2 ('Wir dürfen niemand töten', 16d), which is itself an immediate reworking of the first chorus of Part 2 ('Wäre dieser nicht ein Übeltäter', 16b). Thus there are two levels of recollection working simultaneously, that of the chorus just past, which is then coupled to that of the very first pair of choruses. As if to balance this sense of pairing, the next turba is 'Nicht diesen, sondern Barrabam' (18b), which is another complete reworking of the 'Jesum von Nazareth' music. Then, finally, precisely the same material is interpolated within the later fanning out of matching choruses in mirror order: this is 'Wir haben keinen König' (23f), which comes between the second chorus calling for crucifixion and the final one of the sequence, 'Schreibe nicht: der Jüden König' (25b).

In other words, the 'Jesum von Nazareth' music is used to interact with later choruses that are themselves repeated, as if the recognition of a recent recurrence brings with it a memory of something further back. This is the most ambitious exercise of all in assimilating memory as recollection to memory as interlocking retentions. The listener might develop a doubled sense of temporal grounding in the world of the Passion; a conscious memory is combined with the recall of music that one probably did not realize lay dormant in the memory. This also renders the later repetitions doubly uncanny, something that could also be related back to the Johannine loosening of strictly linear temporal boundaries.

Bringing up again the opening considerations of the theological character of John's Gospel and its implications for Bach's text and setting makes it appropriate to consider a final example from the Matthew Passion. This comes in Jesus' first statement in Part 2 (36a, the most substantial of his three utterances in this latter part), where he prophesies

⁸⁸ See the comments of Spitta, p. 26.

⁸⁹ See Chafe, *Tonal Allegory*, pp. 287–300.

8

Vln I & II

Vla

Bass

Continuo

Doch sa - ge ich euch; Von nun an wirts ge - sche - hen, daß ihr se - hen wer - det des

10

Men - schen Sohn sit - - - zen zur Rech - ten der Kraft und kom - men in den

12

Wol - - - - - ken des Him - mels.

Example 2.5 Matthew Passion, recitative, 36a, bb. 8–12

to the high priests that from now on they will see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the power, coming in the clouds of heaven (see p. 71 and [Example 2.5](#)). Jesus sings the word 'Wolken' ('clouds') to a figure that begins with a four-note pattern (b. 12), which in fact was introduced in the violin parts two bars previously. Given this direct connection with a

specific word, the figure is clearly a form of word-painting for 'clouds', one that has been effectively surrounding the singer for several bars already. Yet the uninformed listener does not realize this connection until Jesus' line explicitly links it with the word 'Wolken'. Here, then, is an example of the music being ahead of what it signifies, something that is perhaps of a piece with the forward-leaning nature of this Passion as a whole. Hearing this section with a little foreknowledge or with a particularly acute awareness of where the biblical words lead, this could be considered an example of the protention of the momentary consciousness. Rather than playing on the notion of retention as in most of these recent examples, this is a present of future things, a sense of what is just to come in the next immediate moment. As is so often the case, this feature of the music is easily assimilated into any theological expectation of what will happen in the much more distant future.

Some conclusions

It is impossible to guess the extent to which Bach was aware of the various conceptions of time that were possible during his lifetime. It is equally impossible to gauge whether he would have been satisfied with the conceptions of time articulated in sources such as Zedler's encyclopaedia, whether he considered himself to be 'ahead' or 'behind' these, whether he ever developed a coherent concept of the time-bound characteristics of music. Much of what I have suggested implies that Bach's music could have contributed to the development of various conceptions of time as well as merely reflecting the norms of his age. Certainly, the music can regulate, combine and contrast several different potentialities for both representing and experiencing time. It does not seem to presuppose a seamless interaction between the time of the music and the surrounding cosmological and personal time (something which we could assume for, say, Renaissance polyphony). To quote Jeremy Begbie, such music 'pulls the strings' of the temporality in which it occurs.⁹⁰ Like Shakespeare's oeuvre from a century or so before, it presupposes differences in time perception and, indeed, different conceptions of how broader spans of time might be formulated. The Bachian perception and configuration of time seems to share something with a variety of early-modern and modern sensibilities (much of my analysis here has been informed by Shakespeare, Proust,

⁹⁰ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, p. 26.

Husserl, Bergson and Ricoeur, for instance). On the other hand, this music lacks the stronger teleology and sense of subjective certainty that much of the Germanic musical canon of the nineteenth century presents.

Bach's various configurations of time introduce elements of 'dissonance' – just as does his harmony – which crave various forms of resolution, but not all of which are necessarily fulfilled in the course of the music. The position of the Passions within the ongoing cycle of church practice suggests that a definite resolution would be unacceptable, and broader eschatological themes imply an even longer trajectory towards an expected consonance.⁹¹ It is not simply a case of Bach's Passions working as a form of musical catharsis. Indeed, the extent to which they agitate the listeners on one level while calming them on another (e.g. in the contrast between the 'Laß ihn kreuzigen' choruses and the notion of healing and reconciliation brought by the 'Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben' episode in the Matthew Passion, 45b–50b), suggests that they are as much anti-cathartic as they are cathartic, and thus highly unusual within the broader context of music drama.

If we allow the flow of the music to interact with our own time consciousness, we can be subtly – and repeatedly – transported between the alternative worlds of the music and the world that we are currently inhabiting. This type of world-creating potential was facilitated in Western music history by the invention of opera, and given an added dimension by the way an aria or other formalized piece of music could be inserted into a dramatic narrative. But, as I hope to have shown, Bach's capitalization of the world-creating potential of opera is combined with the dynamic of immanent participation in a communal act of worship. The Passions therefore not only join the temporal functions of opera with those of church ritual, they also imply an evangelistic sense of stimulating the personal awareness and development of the listener, in a way that is potentially more complex and less predictable than most music drama in the Western tradition.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 103, where the sense of the incompleteness of the present is related to the theological dynamic of promise and fulfilment; moreover, awaiting this resolution can be associated with the cultivation of the quality of patience.

3 | The hermeneutic perspective – negotiating the poles of faith and suspicion

It will already be entirely clear that I see considerable value in interpreting Bach's Passions in terms of extra-musical issues, particularly the broader historical conditions in which modernity developed. In fact, it is difficult to avoid extra-musical readings of any music whatsoever since even a 'purely musical' reading will evoke ideals – such as unity, integrity or cohesion – which are among the moral or political values of a wider culture. But once we allow that music can be discussed in relation to the extra-musical, it is surprisingly difficult to negotiate the borders between plausible readings and ones that are patently illegitimate. For instance, it is clear that I am not necessarily privileging readings that the composer or his associates might consciously have intended (interesting and significant though these can often be). Intentions initially seem to provide a convenient way of delimiting any enquiry that concerns the meaning of any particular work, but this direction soon brings with it problems of knowledge. How do we really know of anyone's intentions, and how can these be plucked out of the continuum of a person who lived within time? This problem of interpreting an author's will, intentions and meaning was recognized even during Bach's lifetime.¹ There is also the question of relevance: whatever might be particularly valuable to us, or to others, could be precisely what the composer did not intend. Given that I propose that this music might be partly constitutive of the paradoxical conditions of early modernity, rather than merely passively reflecting historical givens, much of its significance must surely lie beyond Bach's immediate intentions and purposes. After all, no one ever thought they were wrestling with the paradoxes of modernity as such, at least not until modernity became a conscious construct. We could not expect Bach to display the sort of self-consciousness that seems endemic to modernist composers at the turn of the twentieth century, for instance.

¹ Johann Martin Chladenius, *Einleitung zur richtigen Auslegung vernünftiger Reden und Schriften* (Leipzig, 1742), p. 179. For a translation of this passage, see Peter Szondi, *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Martha Woodmansee (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 89.

What I am aiming towards in this chapter, concerned with the hermeneutic perspective of the Passions (i.e. the ‘meaning’ of the music and particularly music’s interpretative relation to the verbal text), is the notion that this music might generate a certain *meaningfulness* that is more significant – and indeed more real – than any specific meaning or message. In proposing meaningfulness as a particular quality (even a sort of mechanism, perhaps) I am not thereby implying that previous music or even music contemporary with Bach was therefore *meaningless*, rather that Bach’s Passions seem to invite a quest for significance that goes beyond merely presenting the text convincingly. Meaningfulness is necessarily prior to any specific reading or hearing and is consequently not directly reducible to the verbal text. The crucial point is the fact that this music has proved so conducive to the quest for meaning, inviting the attentions of the sort of individuals who find something of themselves in an art form that seems predisposed to converse with them.

Hermeneutic approaches

A hermeneutic attitude can work on many different levels. Most fundamental is the traditional (pre-modern) concept of hermeneutics, which is concerned primarily with verbal text, determining its most obvious and literal meaning, and then – as necessary – inferring meanings that might lie beyond the literal signification. This has numerous precedents within the Christian tradition, beginning with St Paul’s interpretation of the Old Testament in terms of the New, becoming essential to the activities of the Church Fathers and receiving renewed attention at the time of the Reformation. Problematic passages were generally to be understood in relation to the wider whole (something already explicit in Aristotle’s rhetoric), a mode of interpretation that later became known as the ‘hermeneutic circle’ (by which the parts together explain the whole and the whole provides the key to the parts, and so on).² This sort of attitude lies behind Luther’s famous view that ‘Scripture is its own interpreter’. Biblical interpretation was traditionally founded on hermeneutic equity (fairness), that is, the assumption that those meanings are

² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method (Wahrheit und Methode, 1960)*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Continuum, 1989), pp. 291–3; Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition – Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and Its Humanist Reception* (New Haven and London, 1997), pp. 4–5.

true that best accord with the perfection of the writer's language and intentions, that virtuous meanings are to be privileged over the unchaste, pious over the impious – at least until the contrary is proved.³ The concept of equity was still fundamental to interpretation in Bach's time and was embraced by even the most radical theorists of interpretation, those who were beginning to acknowledge an ambiguity or plurality of meaning.⁴

This traditional hermeneutic attitude has often been transferred from biblical exegesis to the interpretation of 'great works of art', by which it is assumed that these are naturally virtuous and perfectly constructed, and that the interpreter's task is to reveal their qualities, integrity and coherence rather than any shortcomings. Paul Ricoeur famously labelled this as one of the poles of hermeneutics, the 'hermeneutics of faith', which is ultimately grounded in the religiously motivated study of revelation in Scripture, but which is easily transferred to the secular world of art appreciation.⁵ From this standpoint, the restoration of the authorially intended meaning and the underlying integrity of the artwork are the principal aims of criticism. It is easy to see how the religiously motivated hermeneutics of faith can become interchangeable with the faith in 'great works' in relation to Bach's Passions: the religious aspect of the works becomes a historical given for secular musicological analysis whilst the aesthetic of great works can become a crucial support for religiously motivated appreciation.

The early modernity of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought some developments within a broadly traditional approach to interpretation. First, there was the growing tendency to view the world in general as open to hermeneutic interpretation and to move beyond the concentration on biblical exegesis. Johann Conrad Dannhauer's coining of the neologism 'hermeneutica' (1629) was part of an attempt to find a universal way of comprehending the new sciences that had recently arisen, together with their various discourses.⁶ This new universalism was made

³ Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (*Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, 1991), trans. Joel Weinsheimer with a foreword by Hans-Georg Gadamer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 57–8; Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition*, pp. 57–63.

⁴ Szondi, *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics*, pp. 91–3.

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 26–36, and 'The Critique of Religion and the Language of Faith', trans. R. Bradley DeFord, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 28/3 (1973), 203–24.

⁶ Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, pp. 47–50.

even more explicit in Georg Friedrich Meier's *Allgemeine Auslegungskunst* (1757), grounded as it was in Leibniz's theory of the 'characteristica universalis', by which everything in the world is a sign for everything else, and where everything interlocks and ultimately leads back to its origins in God.⁷ Another development that might explicitly relate to modernity is that any view of the world is necessarily perspectival, and does not merely duplicate reality.⁸ Martin Chladenius, writing in Leipzig during the time of Bach (*Einleitung zur richtigen Auslegung*, 1742), introduced the idea of 'point of view' (again borrowing from Leibniz, both from his optics and from his concept of windowless monads as the building blocks of all creation). Although Chladenius continued to see the intentions of the author as ideally paramount, he noted that no author could be aware of all the things that his writing might imply, the meaning of words thus going beyond any specific intentions; moreover, the author's consciousness and opinions are likely to have changed in the course of any composition that is not instantaneously created.⁹

If, then, there is some acknowledged slippage in what verbal signs can signify – even in Bach's time – the situation becomes much more complicated when the semantic potential of music is considered.¹⁰ Despite the general development of the view that everything can be a sign for everything else, there is no body of writings that unequivocally demonstrates music in a hermeneutic (interpretative, semantically charged) relation to text or anything else. The theoretical literature that sees analogies between musical composition and rhetoric during the Baroque era is undoubtedly rich,¹¹

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 56–9; Szondi, *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics*, pp. 70–1. See also Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 1963), trans. John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 181. Benjamin observes that Georg Philipp Harsdörffer spoke most radically for the synthesis of all arts, the epitome of the allegorical way of looking at things, even in the middle of the seventeenth century.

⁸ Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, pp. 17–18.

⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 183–4; Szondi, *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics*, pp. 14–17, 28, 35–52, 89–92.

¹⁰ As Ruth HaCohen observes, Shakespeare's Portia shows a remarkable, perhaps unprecedented, insight into the nature of musical meaning when she suggests that the music playing while Bassanio makes his fateful choice will signify different things to him according to whether he wins or loses. Once tinged with whatever it becomes associated, music seems to become powerfully welded to the feelings and meanings concerned. *Merchant of Venice*, III.ii.46–56; Ruth HaCohen, 'Vocal Fictions – The Music Libel Against the Jews' (MS, in preparation), Chapter 3.

¹¹ For a useful summary, see Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica – Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* (Lincoln, Nebr. and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); for a more nuanced critique of this approach, see Bettina Varwig, 'One More Time: J. S. Bach and Seventeenth-Century Traditions of Rhetoric', *Eighteenth-Century Music* 5/2 (2008), 179–208.

but it points to the role of rhetorical thinking in rendering music persuasive as a performed art rather than in explaining how it can carry a specific meaning on its own terms. Perhaps this is just as well, for if it were certain that music always fulfilled a specific function in relation to text, revealing or reinforcing specific levels of meaning, music would simply reduce to the verbal text, like a code to be cracked, its job done once its hermeneutic secrets were disclosed, and consequently of little further interest or value.¹²

This notion of the music becoming ultimately redundant could, of course, have been entirely authentic to the religious functions of music in Bach's age. Music was traditionally classified among the *adiaphora*,¹³ things indifferent that in themselves neither add nor take away from worship, but which if directed in the correct way could well help serve the broader purpose of spreading and enlivening the word of God. But this hardly begins to address the impact and significance of Bach's Passions beyond their immediate liturgical context. In other words, an interpretation geared entirely towards the 'hermeneutics of faith' (in the narrower sense of being concerned with discerning theological meanings alone) is perfectly legitimate as a theological (or even faith-based) exercise, but it is not one that necessarily tells us much about the quality of this music. Nevertheless, it is tempting to conflate the religious and aesthetic versions of the hermeneutic pole of faith, by assuming that excellence in musical construction must always also signify the excellence of Bach's theological interpretation and personal faith, and believe that these are unfailingly communicated through the very sound of the music.

While this sort of hermeneutic approach seeks the restoration of original meanings, a broader historical interpretation of this music in relation to its texts and cultural context can just as easily focus on the demystification of the works as on the restoration of their intended meaning. The most significant trend within this approach in recent years addresses the portrayal of the Jews in both Gospel texts, and particularly that of John, which presents the Jews as the group most directly responsible for the murder of Jesus in the face of a seemingly indifferent (if not

¹² See Carolyn Abbate, 'Cipher and Performance in Sternberg's *Dishonored*', in Karol Berger and Anthony Newcomb (eds.), *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 357–92, esp. p. 367.

¹³ See John Butt, 'Bach's Metaphysics of Music', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 46–59, esp. p. 48; see also Joyce L. Irwin, *Neither Voice nor Heart Alone: German Lutheran Theology of Music in the Age of the Baroque* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 12–22; 112–34.

mildly benevolent) Roman administration.¹⁴ The success that Bach seems to have achieved in setting the words of the crowd has led some to hear the music as specifically anti-Semitic (insipid music would seemingly have been more acceptable); in other words, the text–music relationship is clear enough for this music to be subject to a form of the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’. This is the opposing pole proposed by Ricoeur, the type of reductive criticism enabled by the work of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, revealing hidden cultural or psychological biases of which the author was not necessarily directly conscious.¹⁵ Just as a ‘faithful’ hermeneutic approach will hear a specific, intended, theological discourse as the essence of the music, a discourse that unfolds with ever-bountiful integrity, the ‘suspicious’ hermeneutic listener might hear signs of concrete cultural oppression and traces of the deepest evil in Western culture.

Ricoeur believed that the best interpreters would be able to mediate between the two poles, that each would moderate and inform the other. But there is a certain asymmetry between them, at least insofar as they might be applied to the study of Bach’s Passions. The ‘faithful’ pole presupposes a twofold hermeneutic process: Bach used his music to interpret the text in a specific way, as a hermeneutic act in its own right, and then we interpret Bach’s music and text together, somehow reliving Bach’s initial hermeneutic act within our own. We have to posit the composer as a conscious interpretative agent before we can begin our own interpretation. The ‘suspicious’ pole, on the other hand, does not set such store in Bach’s actual intentions, reducing his role in the creative process to subconscious urges, whether libidinal or grounded in cultural prejudice. Another difference lies in the fact that the ‘faithful’ pole aims at a historically accurate interpretation, something that it shares (at least in spirit) with traditional, pre-modern hermeneutics; the ‘suspicious’ pole belongs entirely to more modern, usually critical approaches, derived from nineteenth-century philosophy and psychology. Given that I am aiming for something beyond historical reconstruction in interpreting Bach’s Passions, I must surely be embracing something of the critical (if not necessarily ‘suspicious’) pole in my overall hermeneutic approach. In any case, perhaps this music would not be so compelling if it did not contain

¹⁴ See Dagmar Hoffmann-Axthelm, ‘Bach und die *Perfidia Iudaica* – Zur Symmetrie der Juden-Turbae in der Johannes-Passion’, *Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis* 13 (1989), 31–54; Michael Marissen, *Lutheranism, Anti-Judaism and Bach’s St John Passion – With an Annotated Literal Translation of the Libretto* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁵ See note 5.

at least the potential for supporting an orthodox scriptural reading on the one hand, and betraying 'hidden' forces, such as the embodiment of its culture's intolerance (or indeed many other issues to do with modernity), on the other. Perhaps something of the charge that has carried these works into later cultures is the listener's intuition of some form of intense spirituality on the one hand, and a feeling of danger on the other.

Reviewing the 'faithful' and 'suspicious' approaches

How do the traditional 'faithful' and 'suspicious' readings of this music operate? To begin with, the reader needs to bring a particular body of knowledge (e.g. theological or cultural-historical) to bear on the music, but will also exercise the traditional hermeneutic strategy of reading parts in relation to a broader whole and vice versa. Any element that initially eludes understanding is placed in the context of that which is clearer, so that the whole informs the details, just as the details add nuance to the whole.¹⁶

The opening chorus of the Matthew Passion provides a good example for traditional theological interpretation, not least because it sets the tone, both musically and textually, for much of the remainder of the piece. Indeed, Picander seems purposely to have set up key words and phrases that later become the opening words of arias. Beginning a Passion with a movement, independent of the Gospel narrative, to establish a theme (like the 'Exordium' which traditionally opens an oration) had become common practice in the Lutheran tradition from at least the time of Schütz. Following Christoph Wolff's interpretation (from which I have already borrowed in [Chapter 2](#), p. 100), one could argue that this opening chorus establishes the seamless integration of madrigalian poetry with Scripture and traditional chorales, since the chorale 'O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig' (a Lutheran version of the Agnus Dei, the text of which ultimately stems from John's Gospel) responds to the dialogue between the two choirs. Wolff describes Bach's music as something in the manner of a French tombeau, 'a funeral march for the multitude of believers who ascend to Mount Zion and the holy city of Jerusalem'.¹⁷ The 'daughter' of the first choir is the allegorical personification of Jerusalem and calls on the

¹⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 176–7.

¹⁷ Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach – The Learned Musician* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2000), p. 302.

‘faithful’ (the seemingly witless second choir, who represent contemporary believers) to join them in witnessing Christ’s sacrifice.¹⁸ With knowledge of the book of Revelation, the reader could easily see how the site of Christ’s Passion, the earthly Jerusalem, is ‘counterposed to the vision of the eternal Jerusalem, whose ruler is the Lamb’ (see p. 100). Wolff’s equation of the two Jerusalems is almost certainly what Bach and Picander intended, given that this is explicit in Picander’s text to Bach’s Cantata 159, ‘Sehet, wir gehn hinauf gen Jerusalem’, which would have been performed directly before the Lenten period of 1727 or 1729 (and so directly anticipating a performance of the Matthew Passion).¹⁹ Wolff suggests that Bach’s setting of the chorus in E minor with the chorale in G major sets up the contrast between a ‘celestial’ major (proclaiming Christ’s innocence) and a ‘terrestrial’ minor. Both the text and this modal duality provide an ultimate goal, which is only resolved by Easter (and, finally, by the end of time, as suggested by the chorale’s sounding from the church’s east gallery, the notional direction of the celestial Jerusalem).²⁰

Wolff’s interpretation of the text, with its rich resonances for the contemporary believer, and theological references to three types of future (that of Jesus’ time, that of the present and that of the end of time), is hardly controversial within the general field of ‘faithful’ hermeneutics. It classically interprets parts in terms of wholes, and the whole to which the meditation seems to lead is – in Christian terms – the most significant whole of all, namely Jesus’ promise of salvation. But the essential question is whether the music really participates in the theological issues articulated by the texts. Given that the chorale is in a major key, Bach really only had the option of setting the opening movement in the same key, or its relative minor. Although it is by no means certain that the newly theorized dichotomy of major and minor yet had the strength it was to acquire in later music,²¹ it is unlikely that Bach would have considered a major key appropriate for the movement as a whole. The polarity described as

¹⁸ As Karol Berger shows, there is an essential connection between the ‘Daughter Zion’ and ‘the Faithful’ – the former is an individual (if more informed) member of the latter’s group; *Bach’s Cycle, Mozart’s Arrow – An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 49, 104.

¹⁹ I am most grateful to Peter Smaill for this observation.

²⁰ See also Christoph Wolff, ‘Bach’s “Great Passion”’, accompanying essay for CD *J. S. Bach, St Matthew Passion*, recorded by John Eliot Gardiner, the Monteverdi Choir and the English Baroque Soloists, Archiv Produktion, 427 648–2 (1989), English version, pp. 24–30.

²¹ Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), esp. pp. 73–85.

'celestial-terrestrial' by Wolff might have been as much the happy by-product of Bach's compositional choices as part of a conscious plan.

On the other hand, much about Wolff's inferences is surely indisputable. It is easy to see that the basic opening style, with its throbbing pedal, corresponds to funeral music (indeed, it has several gestural similarities with the opening chorus of the 'Trauer-Ode', BWV 198, written for the funeral of the Saxon Electoress, Christiane Eberhardine, later in the same year (1727) in which the Matthew Passion was composed). The use of dialogue structure combined with the chorale is also absolutely obvious; indeed, the sense of interplay between the choirs is much greater than it would have been had the text merely been spoken aloud. Music's contrapuntal nature allows the choral text to be combined without undue confusion. In other words, music does have one undoubted advantage over reading or preaching, in that it can convey two texts simultaneously, the listener implicitly invited to make connections. It also articulates the notion of a harmonious whole (the modified da capo form behaving exactly as it should, if in unexpected ways), which is extremely seductive to anyone approaching it with traditional hermeneutic intent. The fact that all the lines and gestures seem to belong together predisposes one to imagine that every aspect of text and music must somehow cohere.

All of these issues relate to music's enabling potential rather than to any specific meaning in itself. However, as with Wolff's theological interpretation of the modal mixture, it is easy to see just how tempting it is to attribute intended meanings to this music. Wolff's uncontentious general approach only needs to be pushed a little further for virtually every aspect of the music to acquire a meaning. Indeed, once one starts to interpret the music in terms of theological significance, it is difficult to stop, as the following 'impersonation' might demonstrate:

The opening chorus of the Matthew Passion begins with a close reference to the French tombeau tradition, something associated in particular with French royalty, the model for absolute monarchy across all Europe. Thus Bach alludes immediately to the royalty of Jesus, ultimately to reign as Lamb next to the Father, as promised in Revelation (21:22–7; 22:1–5). We pick up the allusion to Lamb right from the very first moment, since this movement is based over the throbbing rhythm in the bass instruments (crotchet followed by quaver, in compound time) related to the Italian dance named the *pastorale*,²² and consequently the natural earthly environment for a lamb, the

²² See Doris Finke-Hecklinger, *Tanzcharaktere in Johann Sebastian Bachs Vokalmusik*, Tübinger Bach-Studien, 6 (Trossingen: Hohner, 1970), pp. 82–3.

animal of sacrifice in the Old Testament tradition. That we are correct in this inference seems confirmed by the eventual appearance of the chorale 'O Lamm Gottes', which the congregation would have sung earlier on Good Friday, at the morning service. Moreover, the pastorate dance style is taken up later in the work, in the final aria 'Mache dich, mein Herze, rein' (65), which alludes to the union with Jesus, the believer now carrying him entombed in his heart; here the pastorate rhythm is transformed into the idiom of a celebratory gigue. This aria is in the polar opposite key – B \flat major – to the opening chorus's E minor, suggesting that a complete transformation has taken place, one that facilitates the personal union with Jesus. It is obviously through the crucifixion and Jesus' selfless sacrifice on our behalf that this transformation and union are enabled, and this too is intimated in the opening bar of the entire work, where a 'cross-motif' is heard in the violin 2 parts (the swift turn by which both C \sharp and D \sharp are replaced by naturals is often termed a 'cross-relation' in music theory). Bach also makes the subject of the cross immediately evident to the reader of his score by choosing the key of E minor to begin his Passion: the single sharp on each stave stands for the single cross that brings us salvation.

Also striking right from the start is the sense of fugue (literally, 'flight'),²³ which sums up our natural desire to flee the gory sight of Jesus' Passion and yet also suggests that we, like the music, must follow. The violin 2 parts, leading away in inversion initially, comfort us in the way the cross motive combines with the relentless fugal process; Jesus will carry our cross, in harmony with us as we follow him, just as the later aria 'Komm, süßes Kreuz' will make absolutely clear (where Simon of Cyrene's carrying of Jesus' cross is reinterpreted as Jesus reciprocally carrying ours).

Once the imitative parts have run their course, they are momentarily extended to touch the most dissonant note so far in the piece (f'' natural, in b. 4) which lies in Neapolitan relation to the tonic E (and, as we learn in the last bars of the piece, when the Neapolitan sixth sounds with the word 'Lamb', b. 89, it signifies Jesus' innocent, purest sacrifice). This bar also harmonically touches on the subdominant, A minor, a symbol of Jesus' willing subjugation to his fate, as embodied in the tragic tonality of E minor (which is, incidentally, the traditional key of lamentation, derived from the Phrygian mode and retaining such connotations in the theory of Bach's time).²⁴ This move to the flat side ('moll' in the terminology of Bach's time) could also be interpreted as a softening of the harsh sharp tonality of E minor, given that the single sharp is already understood as a sign of the cross. What this touch of A minor also does is destabilize the tonic pedal sufficiently so that it has to move, as it does in b. 6, in a satisfying circle-of-fifths pattern up to c, which in turn sets up a cadence in the dominant, B minor. The circle of fifths, although incomplete, shows that this music has the potential to traverse the whole tonal space of music,

²³ Bartel, *Musica Poetica*, pp. 277–90.

²⁴ Chafe, *Tonal Allegory*, p. 88.

much as the work does as a whole. As the music unfolds in tonal space, so does Jesus' divinity, revealing him to be equal to the whole of creation.

The dominant restatement of the opening finds its eventual resolution back to E minor, showing us that the tonal departure–return of the opening sixteen bars acts like a microcosm of our own fall away from God's plan, and eventual return, even if E minor can only offer us temporary relief. There is a surprise at the end of the ritornello, however, with the sudden breaking of the woodwind instruments into two antiphonal choirs: these might immediately evoke shepherds' pipes calling across the pastures (particularly with the return of the 'Lamb' motto, the Neapolitan sixth in b. 16), but we soon realize that this unexpected division of forces is there to introduce us to the dialogic nature of this movement, itself a vivid representation of our own dialogue with Jesus. Choir 1 then enters with a plethora of rhetorical figures: the rising *anabasis* of the opening arpeggio exhorts us to worship, but also points to the ultimately positive nature of the Passion's work as it is neatly tied into the cross-motive, taken from the very first bar of the piece; the inner parts respond with the rhetorical figure of *repetitio/anaphora*,²⁵ giving emphasis to our need to join the procession of mourning.

And so it could go on, one immediate danger being extremely obvious by now, namely, that this sort of hermeneutic reading is all too easy to undertake. Bringing a theologically oriented attitude to this music seems to pay dividends, since it facilitates connections and reveals theological ideas on virtually any level. Certainly, to the degree that Walter Benjamin is correct to highlight the Baroque age's devotion to magic and alchemy, there is something historically plausible about this sense of a 'Midas touch', by which everything can be endowed with significance. To Benjamin, transformation was the essence of all sorts of art, and allegory the scheme by which this was ordered.²⁶

In some ways, 'Midas touch' interpretation is like a form of religion in its own right, since any beliefs one brings to the music seem already confirmed in its rich textures, gestures and allusions. I might complain that it is impossible to isolate a cross-figure with any certainty, or that the Neapolitan sixth has a variety of uses in this Passion as a whole, but the faithful hermeneut's answers are always ready to hand: yes, there might be an inconsistency in the use of figures and symbols, but once you understand the whole, the individual instance becomes clear. Yes, the Neapolitan sixth might well find a number of other uses, but once you know that it

²⁵ Bartel, *Musica Poetica*, pp. 184–90.

²⁶ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 229.

means 'Lamb' you hear this concept in counterpoint with whatever the other circumstance brings.

In short, the meaning has to be coherent at some level, just as Scripture itself must cohere for those who believe the Bible to be literally true, or at least to point to a deeper truth, its seeming inconsistencies notwithstanding. Indeed, this is the essence of faith in general (and this can be as much 'aesthetic' faith as religious): meaning and coherence must trump any apparent inconsistency or anomaly. If we cannot find the coherence it is *our* failing rather than that of Scripture or the artwork (and it is therefore not surprising that the creator of an artwork acquires something of the infallibility of God himself). At its extreme, this sort of reading allows no sense of what Wolfgang Iser terms a 'blank' in literature, namely a purposive suspension of connectability between segments or elements, which helps to stimulate the listener's or reader's imagination. Certain genres of didactic literature, such as the *roman à thèse*, tend to avoid blanks for propagandist reasons, so that the reader hardly has to make any effort in constituting the work and merely concentrates on appreciating the reliable communication of its thesis.²⁷ A work without blanks is unlikely to enjoy a promising reception outside the realms of its specific ideological purpose. As Gadamer suggests in relation to drama, a play in which everything is completely motivated 'creaks like a machine', a false reality in which all is determined as if by an equation. Indeed, he suggests, leaving much open and ambiguous contributes immensely to the development of a fable or myth, if this is to be fruitful.²⁸ If Bach's work in the Passions had merely been to convey clear ideas and dogma, these works could well have fallen short of even their religious purpose. The more 'fixed' they are theologically, the less effect they are likely to have in rendering actual both the Passion story and our immediate, subjective reaction.

While a 'faithful' hermeneutics will tend to imagine itself in accord with the composer's deepest but conscious intentions, a 'suspicious' hermeneutics attuned to, say, the anti-Semitic issues, would tend to centre on the composer's unconscious betrayal of racial and cultural prejudice. But the basic procedure is essentially the same:

Bach's music for the Jews in the John Passion is engrained with an anti-Semitic attitude of the most insidious kind. First, the Jews' race and culture are shown to have the utmost sterility in their dogged

²⁷ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading – a Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 189–95.

²⁸ See also Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 499.

repetition of the same music, most notably that of the 'Jesum von Nazareth' chorus, throughout the work. This same repetitive instinct is confirmed in later choruses that are also repeated, one of them even copied, parrot-fashion from the music of the spiteful Roman soldiers, who could not be expected to know any better ('Sei gegrüßet', which, in the voice of the Jews, becomes 'Schreibe nicht'). This all conforms to a prejudice against the Jewish faith that has its roots in the earliest years of the church: namely, that the religion is literalistic, sterile and repetitive, 'carnal' in its adherence to literal law rather than 'spiritual' and active like Christianity.²⁹

Then there is the way the music for the Jews is written: the striking suspensions and insistent rhythms of the 'Kreuzige' choruses produce some of the most violent music that Bach was ever to write, the dactylic repetitions sounding positively primitive in relation to the usual refinement of his style. The fugue that Bach employs for 'Wir haben ein Gesetz' and 'Läsest du diesen los' is also primitive in its permutational structure (a style of composition that Bach practised largely in his youth), the three lines of music working with mechanical predictability like the assumed Jewish laws themselves. In comparison with Bach's 'Christian' fugues (e.g. that opening the Mass in B minor) this one is literally overloaded with words, giving the form the sense of absurd argumentativeness that has long been a Jewish stereotype (the same sort of indulgently spiteful repetitiveness is evident in the earlier chorus where the Jews ask Simon Peter if he is one of the disciples – 'Bist du nicht seiner Jünger einer?'). In the two matching choruses identifying Jesus as a malefactor ('Wäre dieser nicht ein Übeltäter') and maintaining that only the Romans can put a man to death ('Wir dürfen niemand töten'), the fugal 'rule' of the Jews involves chromatic scales forced into close stretto, which not only creates intervals that would otherwise be considered 'illegal' in harmonic theory, but which also sounds literally as a malign cacophony, profoundly inhuman in its effect of mechanical necessity and alienating dissonance.

Yet there is also something strangely beautiful about these profoundly violent choruses. Bach engineers them so that they are essentially autonomous musical structures, despite their very violent affects. Indeed they can be viewed and heard as pieces of music that take us beyond the immediacy of their sordid subject matter towards a world of perfection seemingly unsullied by human concerns. Such an aesthetic presence, independent of moral or semantic value, is itself a form of violence against the human condition, a dark undercurrent that lies behind all supposedly autonomous art in the Western tradition. Actual violence is normally 'local' and historically contingent (and occasionally to be excused, if it results from impossible conditions), while the violence that is sublimated in autonomous musical structures is turned towards the universal and consequently acquires an enduring beauty: this cannot be excused under any circumstances. Ultimately, this sort of aestheticized violence is analogous to the extremes of

²⁹ Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition*, pp. 56–63.

violence against the Jews within the modern world. The aesthetic mindset brings with it a sense of dispassionate autonomy and the separation of the spheres of human action, enabling violence to be practised on an industrial scale as never before; this is something which has been eloquently shown in countless studies of the Holocaust and its aftermath.

Again, with just a few pre-existing ideas about how this music signifies, a 'suspicious' interpretation unfolds with very little effort, even if the reasoning can be just as inconsistent as in the 'faithful' interpretation (e.g., one could note that there is equally violent and spiteful music for the Romans; the opening 'Christian' chorus contains its own fair share of dissonant intervals and seemingly mechanical imitation). Just as 'faithful' hermeneutics presumes that the work is always basically 'right' and that it is up to us to discover its secrets and coherence, the 'suspicious' hermeneutics will presuppose that there is always something sinister underlying even the most seemingly beautiful moments. And the interpretation allows no slippage or ducking in different directions: if the music is ugly it is demeaning of the personages it depicts; if the music is beautiful (or if the ugly can somehow be reheard as beautiful), then this is equally bad since it aestheticizes violence. The notion that artistic presentation can make even the unpleasant appear pleasant has a very long genealogy, stretching back at least to Aristotle.³⁰ One begins to wonder whether the 'suspicious' hermeneut would perhaps be comfortable only with a form of music that was simple enough to invite no hermeneutic inferences whatever. Perhaps this attitude is really the articulation of a form of Puritanism and links closely to those who are suspicious of the religious use of 'art' music since it has the potential to corrupt the text as much as to illustrate and deepen it.

One question that immediately springs up in connection with both types of interpretation is whether this music would incline one towards some form of the Christian faith on the one hand, or towards anti-Semitism on the other, if one were not already predisposed towards either (or both). While it is obvious that both Passions have undoubtedly inspired countless listeners towards an experience of what could loosely be described as the spiritual, and have also led many to delight in the exquisite pain of dissonance and agitated gestures, this is not the same as saying that such listeners have carried away with them a specific meaning or belief, or a prejudice about the types of people represented.

³⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 113.

Yet it is surely unsatisfactory to conclude here that these various meanings discerned in the music are simply, and always, imaginary and that it is simply innocent of any cultural meaning or resonance. If this were so, we might begin to wonder whether music of this kind had any value whatsoever. Moreover, this is to escape once more into a sort of aesthetic prejudice that devalues the human elements in art and sees works as transcending the mere contingencies of human beliefs and conflict. And, for some reason, the stakes in this music seem far higher than for most earlier music – if, for instance, compelling evidence of musical anti-Semitism were discerned in Schütz's music, this could be put down to historical particularity, it would not be something that can 'touch' us today. The political and religious connotations of Handel's music have hitherto seemed to be largely unproblematic, even with works culminating in noticeably violent forms of religious triumphalism, such as *Messiah*. Here we seem to be able to brush off the dashing to pieces of the ungodly as a wonderful poetic image that need not affect us, or anyone else, directly.³¹ In the final analysis, though, it has to be accepted that all works of this kind have – along with countless other products of Western Christian culture – played a part in the genealogy of what later became a racially based anti-Semitism.³² One of the central aims of both this chapter and the study as a whole is to suggest that original meanings and uses – whether intended or not – cannot alone explain either the significance or the quality of Bach's Passions within the broader culture of musical modernity. Indeed, if they could, these works would lack the specific charge that I am attempting to attribute to them.

Rethinking text–music relations

The faithful and suspicious interpretations show obvious shortcomings and attractions, and both are equivalent in assuming a relatively unproblematic unfolding of musical meaning. It is necessary, then, to give more attention to the mechanics of text–music relations in order to gauge the plausibility of any particular interpretation. To begin with, we should consider the seemingly unfruitful possibility that music may sometimes

³¹ For a fresh consideration of the anti-Judaic elements of *Messiah*, see Michael Marissen, 'Rejoicing against Judaism in Handel's *Messiah*', *Journal of Musicology* 24/2 (2007), 167–94.

³² See, for instance, Lisa Freinkel, 'The Merchant of Venice: "Modern" Anti-Semitism and the Veil of Allegory', in Hugh Grady (ed.), *Shakespeare and Modernity – Early Modern to Millennium* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 122–41.

not relate directly to text at all. For instance, it is unlikely that traditional polyphony in the Renaissance tradition was fundamentally designed to serve the text in a specifically interpretative way, occasional instances of word-painting notwithstanding. The standard contrapuntal and thoroughbass treatises of Bach's age suggest that music continued to be learned fundamentally as a language in its own right, with its own syntax and rhetoric, quite apart from the contingencies of text. In short, we have to allow that much of Bach's music might have been developed and extended in line with purely compositional imperatives, its co-ordination with a text and any resulting meaning being largely incidental.

If music is to be more closely associated with text, one of its most basic functions – as epitomized in the early Lutheran Passions of Johann Walter (still very much in liturgical use in Bach's Leipzig) – is to provide a medium by which the text can be presented simply and clearly, without any 'interference' from musical gestures or figures. It is difficult to find many places in Bach's Passions that are specifically uninflected, with the possible exception of the simpler choral harmonizations. Indeed, one of the few examples of unequivocally simple text setting, Pilate's inscription on the cross 'Jesus von Nazareth, der Jüden König' – 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews' (John Passion 25a, bb. 8–9), somehow sounds in its context as what it actually is – a formal inscription – with the sort of gravity and seriousness that this implies, and it is therefore hardly neutral at all. The musical setting of the narrative in recitative and chorus serves the text clearly and effectively by going well beyond neutral presentation; the music shades the basic contours of the sentences and often the individual words and syllables themselves. However, the question then becomes one of whether the music goes further than merely shadowing and perhaps amplifying the words, like the gold plating added to an already fully formed bas-relief.³³ At what point does the music bring out the semantic qualities of the words that would not have been evident had the words been heard alone? This was clearly a legitimate concern for composers of Bach's time, if Kuhnau's comments introducing some of his cantatas are anything to go by.³⁴ Kuhnau suggests that by

³³ I borrow this analogy from Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices – Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 27, where it is used in relation to the broader question of whether music narrates, as an independent discourse, when tracing a pre-existent plot.

³⁴ For a translation by Ruben Weltsch, see Carol K. Baron (ed.), *Bach's Changing World – Voices in the Community* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), pp. 219–26. See also Bettina Varwig, 'One More Time'.

considering differing translations of a text and allowing their emerging connotations to take their course, musical invention can be stimulated in such a way as to make it more apt to serve its purpose of the delectation and moving of the spirit. This seems less a case of the music precisely interpreting a text than the composer somehow using the various images and nuances of the text and its translations as a stimulus for musical invention. Music and text thus unfold along parallel lines, but do not necessarily connect directly. Kuhnau then seems to assume that the resulting music, in turn, helps set in train for the listener various images and nuances implicit in the text but which might otherwise have remained dormant. We might hear a development of musical ideas in terms of repetition, variation and development, which in turn predispose us to consider the implications of the text. Simple and embryonic though it might be, Kuhnau's conception might well be pointing to the way music in general can exercise our thought processes, paralleling the way our verbal concepts develop in time. If it does indeed dispose us towards the activity of textual interpretation this is not the same as the music fixing a specific meaning for us.

There are some, quite rare, instances where the music renders actual something relating to the text: this is evident, for instance, in the first turba chorus of the Matthew Passion (4b), where the word 'Aufruhr' (uproar) is literally evoked in the way all eight voices sing semiquaver patterns together (b. 13); for a moment, there is actually the sound of an uproar so long as the singers articulate their lines with a moderate attack. The fact that the high priests and elders are insisting that the killing of Jesus should not coincide with the Passover feast – since this would cause an uproar – seems to make the *actual* sound of an uproar all the more potent. The music works as a warning of what would have happened had the crucifixion to have been postponed; it does something above and beyond what the words alone would have done (and we cannot necessarily exclude the possibility that Bach was subconsciously articulating here something of the long-lived Christian prejudice about the noises emanating from the Jewish ghettos).³⁵ Moreover, for us, the fact that the music 'becomes' what did not in fact happen in the narrative almost seems to make what *does* happen all the more realistic. It might also be significant that one of the most dramatic moments in both Passions, the chorus 'Sind Blitze, sind Donner' (MP 27b), also refers to something that does *not*

³⁵ As Ruth HaCohen notes (private communication), an Italian expression for 'to make an uproar' is 'Fare un ghetto'.

actually happen (the believer's question is rhetorical: why does God not send lightning and thunder to strike down the perpetrators of this crime?) There is much that is close to (or could indeed be confused with) the actual sound of thunder here, as if to remind us that there was once an age of miracles – realistically portrayed in the present – even if this one specific miracle did not occur. In all, then, just as music can exercise our capacity to develop the nuances of verbal meaning through its own parallel processes of development, it might also occasionally exercise our capacity to imagine the reality of the events to which it relates through a direct doubling of something implicit in that reality.

Literal in a different way is the brief chorus in the Matthew Passion where each disciple asks whether it is he who will betray Jesus (9e, 'Herr, bin ichs?'); we hear the full phrase eleven times (across the four vocal lines) in a way that seems to re-create what happened in the original scenario when Judas, the traitor himself, presumably remained silent. There is no point in calling this a form of 'hidden' symbolism, since the effect is entirely literal, if perhaps not so real as the sense of 'uproar' was.

Closely related to these effects, but not to be directly confused with them, is the concept of word-painting. This is the situation where music provides a sort of musical picture that accompanies the words (rather than a direct actualization in the sense I have so far described), a picture that is more or less unequivocal in fulfilling this function rather than being a matter for debate or interpretation. The John Passion contains perhaps the most vivid examples of this: we hear a musical impersonation of a cockcrow in 12c, b. 30, but not as an actual cockcrow and thus not in the way that 'Aufruhr' was an actual uproar ('Sind Blitze', MP, perhaps lies at the threshold of word-painting, in that we don't hear actual thunder but might imagine we do). Similarly, we have the very vivid scourging of Jesus in JP 18c, bb. 26–8, clearly depicted in the rhythm and mood of the music, but not really becoming an actual scourging (except perhaps in whatever is heard in the various scratches and attacks of the bowed bass instruments).³⁶ Word-painting can also work at one remove, such as in Bach's occasional use of triadic music to depict warfare (something owing its lineage both to the literal sound of natural trumpets and historically to the agitated 'stile concitato', categorized as warlike by Monteverdi). This is evident in the John Passion, first at the point where Jesus states that were

³⁶ Naomi Cumming, adapting Peirce's system of signs, labels the results of actual bodily action the 'timbral grain', in 'The Subjectivities of "Erbarme Dich"', *Music Analysis* 16/1 (1997), 5–44, esp. 10.

his kingdom to be in this world his servants would be fighting (16e, bb. 76–7); second, in the central section of 'Es ist vollbracht' (30, bb. 20–40), relating to the victory of the hero of Judah. This sort of device enters the field of allegory, by which one element stands for another through some sort of historical association (i.e. the use of trumpets in military situations).³⁷ An uninformed listener would probably miss this, but a modicum of knowledge about the characteristics of the trumpet and its historical use would render the connection clear enough.

Rather more complex is the third-person depiction of Peter's weeping in both Passions, especially protracted in the John Passion, 12c, bb. 33–8. This is undoubtedly a form of word-painting (not least because of the third-person nature of the utterance, the Evangelist 'painting' what Peter did), but there is a sense in which the modulations through which the Evangelist's voice are forced are at times identical to the way his voice would sound in the vocalizations of weeping. This brings up the question of the way music has some of its roots in common with the expression of human emotion: emotions seem to be among the most natural aspects of the human condition, but even a young child can soon turn weeping into a stylized performance, one that might feel 'natural' enough to her at the time, but which requires some considerable creative input and development if it is to be sustained. It might well be possible, then, to hear music such as Bach's as sometimes rendering actual the sound of an emotion in the text, to the extent that 'actual' emotions themselves require a degree of artifice to be expressed convincingly. To put this another way: music cannot contain the essence of any emotion, because it is not a being as such, but its processes of developing, representing and communicating emotion may well double what we do as human beings. This is particularly the case with emotional utterances that customarily have specific vocal expression (e.g. the rising 'sighs' of a minor sixth in 'Zerfließe, mein Herze' in the John Passion (35) and 'Erbarme dich' (39) in the Matthew Passion). These examples surely build on the way we might vocalize sorrowful emotion, although this 'natural' connection is only momentary. The music artificially extends and structures an impulse or emotion in the way we might already do with our own feelings, but obviously takes this process much further. Indeed, the formal control and tautness of structure for which Bach is customarily credited could be considered as a sort of exercise in the stimulating and structuring of emotions – perhaps part of

³⁷ For this definition of allegory, see Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 62–70.

the directed discipline of the early modern subject. Like an actual picture, much of Bach's word-painting shares something with what it presents, but the music is not exhausted once its pointing function is fulfilled, merely as a means to an end, since we surely hear instances of emotional representation as part of a broader continuum.³⁸ This continuum – in which emotions come and go, can be developed or can inflect one another – is surely not unlike that of our own consciousness.

If the notion of rendering aspects of the text actual (or as a picture, or as a combination of the two) is undoubtedly an essential feature of this music, it is only a part of the overall impact, a collection of scattered incidents rather than the continuous substance of the works as a whole. These instances do not require any particular hermeneutic effort on the part of the listener or scholar, and there is nothing particularly hidden about them. Perhaps, for this reason, they have customarily not been valued as much as they could be (as, for instance, an insight into how music works in relation to text or emotion in general, perhaps doubling the way emotions play out in time consciousness). Bach reception since the mid-nineteenth century has tended to prize meanings or senses that are not immediately evident over those that are overt. It is almost as if the obvious skill and complexity of Bach's compositional practice must naturally coincide with a similar degree of hermeneutic obscurity. He is not to be merely an excellent presenter of text and its attendant emotions, but also a presenter who interprets text in the manner of a theologian and who renders these theological insights convincing (or subconsciously persuasive) for the listener. For this to happen, the music must have the power to signify independently of text, in order to bring out other meanings, ones that might even work productively at cross-purposes with the literal sense of the text. The type of meaning that music transmits in this way seems not to belong to the primary mode of scriptural interpretation (i.e. the literal, immediate, single sense) but to relate to one of the three further methods of interpretation advocated by some of the Church Fathers, such as Origen. These are, namely, the typological or allegorical level, which was so significant in linking the New to the Old Testament, or in overcoming inconsistencies and seemingly unacceptable passages; the tropological or moral level, which had to do with codes of behaviour; and the anagogical, which related to eschatological issues and the ultimate aims of our being. There is some degree of irony in claiming for Bach's

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 146, where Gadamer relates this form of ontological sharing to his concept of a symbol.

music an allegorical function, since Luther and his most important codifier of doctrine, Philipp Melanchthon, warned against the indiscriminate application of allegory and saw the most secure meaning as lying in the intentions behind a text, to be discerned through the part-to-whole analysis.³⁹ On the other hand, as Walter Benjamin suggests in his study of seventeenth-century German tragic drama, virtually anything can be read as an allegory of something else in a culture of resemblance.⁴⁰ If this is relevant in relation to Bach, it would suggest that there is a degree of historical authenticity in reading the Passions allegorically, but (as I have already tried to show) there is not necessarily any way of distinguishing a correct reading from an incorrect one.

The allegorical approach is epitomized in Eric Chafe's work, in which virtually any aspect of the music can have interpretative significance, not merely rendering the text and its sense clear, but by drawing out a deeper theological point that would not be implicit in the literal sense of the text. One of Chafe's most telling examples concerns the 'Jesum von Nazareth' chorus, heard twice in quick succession at the beginning of the John Passion narrative (2b, 2d).⁴¹ This is reused later and helps to articulate the hidden identity of Jesus as the true King of the Jews (such as in 'Wir haben keinen König', 23f, when the Jews claim they have no king, but the music itself seemingly repeats the name of the 'true' king 'Jesum von Nazareth'). There is no doubt that this is an interpretation that could be made by someone with a smattering of knowledge of John's Gospel (and this would seem to apply equally to the listener of Bach's day as to ours, obvious cultural and historical differences notwithstanding). However, that fact does not render it entirely certain that this interpretation is the sole meaning of the music, one deriving from Bach's own activity as a theological interpreter of the text. After all, plenty of other choruses are repeated in this Passion (and there are other repetitions of this chorus), so if Bach's hermeneutic music is to have any secure meaning, such repetitions would always have to carry some sort of meaning relating to hidden identity. There is no doubt that the concept of repetition comes directly out of rhetorical practice – it is a way of emphasizing something, extending it and rendering it memorable – but the fact that

³⁹ For a brief survey of allegorical interpretation of the Bible in early Christianity, see Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, pp. 29–32; on the Lutheran tradition, pp. 39–44, and Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition*, pp. 79–100.

⁴⁰ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, pp. 174–5.

⁴¹ Chafe, *Tonal Allegory*, pp. 287–302.

music might work rhetorically does not thereby imply that it carries specific meaning.

Nevertheless, Chafe's reading of this music is certainly a possible one; it is possible because of the specific knowledge, experience and conception of the whole piece that he himself brings to it. It is now a commonplace in hermeneutic theory that interpretation requires a blending of the horizons of the work and the reader, but such blending does not mean that the modern reader becomes assimilated to the historical reading of the author's time or vice versa (the original meaning entirely replaced by the reader's). Even 'correct' historical knowledge will not concretize the 'correct' meaning, since each listener and reader will bring entirely different perspectives, and the music is simply not consistent enough in its structures (such as the use of repeating choruses) for a successful interpretation ever to be independently and repeatedly confirmed. Such music is very different from a word or phrase, which must carry sufficient consistency of meaning from one context to another to facilitate any form of reliable communication. Chafe's sort of reading is disingenuous if it claims to be a statement of absolute historical truth, but it is perfectly viable as a reading that blends some historical knowledge with the priorities and insights of the present, since this is the condition of all historical interpretation. Any discussion of the reading's value would have to take into account current perspectives and priorities as much as its grounding in historical evidence.

Many readings of Bach's music, and particularly his Passions, assume there to be a level of connection between music and text that is almost of sacred significance and therefore something far more essential than the precarious counterpoint of text, music and reader. This goes beyond the notion of hermeneutics as an activity embedded in history and the historicity of both reader and work, and comes close to a transhistorical, religious practice. Music is interpreted beyond the level of allegory (the association between two largely dissimilar, but connectable, elements) towards the notion of spiritualized symbol (where the music might have some sort of essential connection with the thing alluded to).⁴² Much is made, for instance, of the way the notes opening the 'Crucify' choruses of the two Passions ('Kreuzige' in the John Passion (21d, 23d) and 'Laß ihn kreuzigen' (45b, 50b) in the Matthew Passion) display on paper the emblem of the cross on its side, if the first and fourth notes and the second and third are joined (see [Examples 3.1](#) and [3.2](#)).

⁴² See Gadamer's distinction, note 37, above.

Example 3.1 shows a musical score for the John Passion, chorus 'Kreuzige', measures 29–30. The score is for Soprano and Alto. The Soprano part starts with a whole note 'Kreuzige' and continues with 'kreuzige, kreuzige, kreuzige'. The Alto part starts with a whole note 'Kreuzige' and continues with 'kreuzige, kreuzige, kreuzige'.

Example 3.1 John Passion, chorus 'Kreuzige', 21d, bb. 29–30

Example 3.2 shows a musical score for the Matthew Passion, chorus 'Laß ihn kreuzigen', measures 36–38. The score is for Tenor and Bass. The Tenor part starts with a whole note 'Laß ihn kreuzigen' and continues with 'kreuzigen, kreuzigen, kreuzigen'. The Bass part starts with a whole note 'Laß ihn kreuzigen' and continues with 'kreuzigen, kreuzigen, kreuzigen'.

Example 3.2 Matthew Passion, chorus 'Laß ihn kreuzigen', 45b, bb. 36–8

It is also true that the notes 'cross' one another in sound, something that is almost felt physically in the throat if one tries to sing the single line of the Matthew Passion example. Nevertheless, it must immediately be acknowledged that the suspensions of the John Passion chorus – emotively striking though they are – directly exemplify a fundamental musical figure, namely a suspension (*syncope/syncopatio*),⁴³ one that is an essential element in virtually all the music that Bach wrote. As in the case of the repetition of the 'Jesum von Nazareth' choruses, it is implausible to isolate a deep or partly hidden meaning within a figure that is absolutely standard to the compositional technique. The line of the Matthew Passion chorus is certainly more exceptional, but the ugly intervals, challenging the singer to negotiate uncomfortable changes of register, are common practice in music embodying an agitated affect (*passus duriusculus*, a harsh step or passage, or *saltus duriusculus*, a harsh leap).⁴⁴ Again, the purpose is surely the immediate effect of a voice wrestling with unvocal gestures. Nevertheless, it is perhaps worth extending the question as to whether Bach had a concept of a cross symbol, something that implies a deeper engagement with theological implications of the cross (derived, say, from Luther's theology of the cross), and that can be used as a potent emblem elsewhere in the piece. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 outline all the instances of uses of the

⁴³ Bartel, *Musica Poetica*, pp. 396–405.

⁴⁴ Both of these terms seem to be the invention of Christoph Bernhard, in the middle of the seventeenth century; see Bartel, 357–8, 381–2.

Table 3.1 Settings of the word 'Kreuz' and its derivatives in the John Passion

21d, b. 29 onwards:	Chorus 'Kreuzige' – suspensions between staggered voices
21e, b. 54:	Pilate 'und kreuziget ihn' – rise of a major sixth as part of a modulation from G minor to D minor
21g, bb. 97–8:	Pilate 'Weißest du nicht, daß ich Macht habe, dich zu kreuzigen' – rise of an augmented fourth, as part of a sharpwards progression from A minor/C major to B minor
23d, b. 48 onwards:	Chorus 'Kreuzige' – directly analogous to 21d, above
23e, bb. 72–3:	Pilate 'Soll ich euren König kreuzigen?' – imperfect cadence ('Phrygian') shaping the question, with no particular melodic inflection
23g, bb. 80–1:	Evangelist 'daß er gekreuziget würde' – rising diminished seventh becoming Neapolitan sixth to inflect cadence
b. 84:	'Und er trug sein Kreuz' – rising diminished seventh to 'Kreuz'
24, bb. 99, 106:	Bass's 'zum Kreuzeshügel' – first instance presents a rising augmented fourth followed by a modest conjunct rise to '-hügel' (thus picturing a 'little hill') but with no other obvious inflection for the second instance
25a, b. 1:	Evangelist 'Allda kreuzigten sie ihn' – falling diminished fifth on 'kreuzigten'
b. 7:	Evangelist 'und satzte sie auf das Kreuz' – rise of minor sixth to 'Kreuz'
b. 13:	Evangelist 'da Jesus gekreuziget ist' – 'gekreuziget' set to falling diminished seventh, followed by rise of diminished fourth
26, b. 3:	Chorale 'dein Nam und Kreuz allein' – 'Kreuz' falls on 6/4 chord (the same music sets the word 'fröhlich' on the repeat of the first part of the chorale)
27a, b. 2:	Evangelist 'da sie Jesum gekreuziget hatten' – no specific inflection for 'gekreuziget'
27c, b. 71:	Evangelist 'Es stund aber bei dem Kreuze Jesu seine Mutter' – 'bei dem Kreuz-' set as descending diminished fifth, no other inflection
32, bb. 9 and 10:	Bass 'da du nunmehr ans Kreuz geschlagen' – first 'Kreuz' set as the descending minor sixth that has characterized the bass's melody from the start; second 'Kreuz' is a conjunct run covering a diminished fifth
36, bb. 3–4:	Evangelist 'daß nicht die Leichname am Kreuze blieben den Sabbath über' – 'Kreuze' set as peak of phrase within diminished-seventh harmony
b. 11:	Evangelist 'der mit ihm gekreuziget war' – falling diminished seventh for 'ihm ge-kreu-', followed by rising minor sixth
38, b. 19:	Evangelist 'da er gekreuziget ward' – 'ge-kreu-' set to rising augmented fourth

word 'Kreuz' (together with its various compounds and derivatives) in both Passions.

Several interesting issues arise from this survey: most obviously, the fact that there is really no evidence of a 'cross-like' symbol to be indelibly associated with the word 'Kreuz' and its derivatives. The two instances normally discussed as resembling crosses visually ([Examples 3.1](#) and [3.2](#)) are by no means the models for the others, although in their overall effect they clearly belong to a broader family of emotionally charged figures.

Table 3.2 Settings of the word 'Kreuz' and its derivatives in the Matthew Passion

1, b.35:	Ripieno chorale 'am Stamm des Kreuzes geschlachtet' – no inflection
b. 73 etc.:	Chorus 'Holz zum Kreuze selber tragen' – 'Kreuze' generally sung to conjunct notes (although first alto appearance covers a diminished fifth); this music was originally set to the text 'Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen'
2, b. 7:	Jesus 'daß er gekreuziget werde' – 'gekreuziget' sung to rising diminished fifth, followed by descending diminished fifth a tone lower, and rising major sixth
23, b. 17 etc.:	Bass 'Kreuz und Becher' – no particular inflection to 'Kreuz' although part of a chromatically inflected sequence
29, b. 90 etc.:	Chorale 'wohl an dem Kreuze lange' – no particular inflection for 'Kreuze'
45b, b. 36 etc.:	Chorus 'Laß ihn kreuzigen' – 'cross' motive consisting initially of diminished fourths and fifths and then extended with a mixture of diatonic and chromatic figures
50b, b. 3 etc.:	repeat of 'Laß ihn kreuzigen' (45b, above) a tone higher
50e, bb. 39–40:	Evangelist 'daß er gekreuziget würde' – no particular inflection, although 'kreu-' falls on a diminished-seventh chord
55, b. 5:	Evangelist 'daß sie ihn kreuzigten' – 'kreu-' begins with ornamented minor third accompanied by continuo figure involving chromatic approach to the dominant
bb. 9–10:	'daß er ihm sein Kreuz trug' – no inflection, although 'Kreuz' sets highest note of phrase
56, bb. 2–3:	Bass 'zum Kreuz gezwungen sein' – leap of diminished seventh up to 'Kreuz'
57, b. 9 etc.:	Bass 'Komm, süßes Kreuz' – no particular inflection for 'Kreuz' (generally much more for 'süßes')
58a, bb. 7–8:	Evangelist 'Da sie ihn aber gekreuziget hatten' – descending diminished fifth for 'ge-kreu-'
b. 22	'Und da wurden zween Mörder mit ihm gekreuziget' – upward leap of major sixth
58b, b. 40:	Chorus 'so steig herab vom Kreuz!' – final chord of chorus, imperfect ('Phrygian') cadence
58d, b. 50 etc.:	Chorus 'so steige er nun vom Kreuz' – no particular inflection (initially part of descending conjunct pattern, presumably depicting the notional descent from the cross)
58e, bb. 65–6:	Evangelist 'die mit ihm gekreuziget waren' – phrase 'ihm gekreuziget' set above Neapolitan sixth chord
59, bb. 6–7:	Alto 'wird als ein Fluch ans Kreuz gestellt' – leap of augmented fourth to 'Kreuz'
64, bb. 11–12:	Bass 'denn Jesus hat sein Kreuz vollbracht' – no particular inflection

In fact, the survey demonstrates clearly the way this music works as a rhetoric rather than as the sort of 'leitmotivic' language that many scholars assume. There are indeed various musical devices that can be used to stress an extraordinary word or concept, devices that go against the grain of 'normal' musical texture. These include rising sixths, which are related to the 'exclamatio' (exclamation) family of figures by at least one music

theorist (perhaps because of their sigh-like sound);⁴⁵ then there is the augmented fourth or diminished fifth, traditionally excluded from melodic lines (as ‘the devil in music’); Bach also seems to favour diminished sevenths (intervallically identical with major sixths). All of these figures are fundamentally difficult to sing, often crossing natural registers (in the case of sixths and diminished sevenths), so there is a sense that the discomfort experienced by the singers can be used to expressive effect. It seems clear that the choice and significance of each figure is dependent on context rather than any direct semantic purpose. The example from the John Passion, 23g, of the rising diminished seventh used twice for a ‘Kreuz-’related word (bb. 80–1 and then again in b. 84), could be explained by imagining the composer’s subconscious repetition of an interval he had used for a similar word just before, creating a local consistency of music and text. Given that the second instance is a tone above the first, there is also the hint of a melodic sequence here, which might encourage us to imagine the person of the Evangelist as someone who accents similar words occurring in close succession in similar ways.

The table also demonstrates succinctly a quantitative difference in the number of ‘expressive’ devices used in the two Passions. The John Passion examples contain many more of the striking intervals of sixths, diminished sevenths and augmented fourths/diminished fifths; ‘unmarked’ settings of ‘Kreuz-’related words are in a definite minority. In the Matthew Passion, there are also examples of striking intervals, but the majority of instances show no particular inflection for the word. This difference between the two Passions shows that there is less obvious word-painting in the narrative sections of the later Passion. Perhaps this was a way of rendering the expressiveness of the ariosos and arias that much more acute.

Not only do the recitatives of the John Passion contain more examples of gestures and intervals that express emotive words, but so also do the chorale settings. The first chorale in the John Passion, ‘O große Lieb’ (3) (to the melody of ‘Herzliebster Jesu’), appropriately employs a chromatic passage (*passus duriusculus*) for the text ‘diese Marterstraße’ (‘this path of martyrdom’). The first chorale of the Matthew Passion, ‘Herzliebster Jesu’ (3), uses exactly the same melody, but this setting is generally free of chromatic inflection (even for the emotive text at the equivalent point, ‘Daß man ein solch scharf Urteil hat gesprochen?’, ‘that such a harsh judgement is pronounced?’, or later, ‘was für Missetaten’, ‘what kind of

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 265–9; see also p. 138.

misdeeds'). Even more striking in its chromatic effect is the shocking move to a dominant seventh over d on the word 'Böses' (evil) in b. 13 of 'Petrus, der nicht denkt zurück' (JP 14), something which goes against the standard rules of harmony (the figure of *parrhesia*),⁴⁶ since the seventh is not correctly prepared. One might imagine that Bach viewed such a violation of harmony as not just an appropriate evocation of evil, but even as a momentary actualization of disharmony and thus as an actual evil, displayed for instructive purposes within a 'controlled' liturgical environment. Again, though, none of this suggests that the music 'means' the word concerned in a sense that could simply be translated from music to text and back again; after all, a chromatic line can also be used to highlight a positive word (e.g. 'Gottes Gnaden', 'God's grace', in b. 38 of the aria 'Erwäge' in the John Passion, 20).

The association of expressive intervals with emotive words is obviously not absent in the narrative sections of the Matthew Passion, but there is a particular emphasis on one specific interval in both narrative and meditative music, namely the Neapolitan sixth. As has already been noted (p. 71) it has a prominent place at the end of the main ritornello for the first chorus, b. 16 (it later coincides with the word 'Lamm' at the end of the chorus, b. 89; see my 'impersonation' of a hermeneutic analysis, p. 155); its melodic shape (if not its characteristic 6/3 harmony) is heard shortly after, in Jesus' first utterance, when he prophesizes that the son of man will be crucified (2, b. 7, 'daß er gekreuziget werde'). It appears again in Jesus' statement that the woman has poured the costly ointment upon him in order to prepare his body for burial (4e, b. 43, for the word 'begraben', 'bury'), and also at the cadence of the first accompanied recitative (5, b. 9) and of the first aria (6, bb. 9–10). Another cluster of Neapolitan sixths occurs around the scenes concerning Peter's (ultimately failed) promise to stand by Jesus whatever might transpire: first Peter uses it at the words 'so will ich dich nicht verleugnen' ('even then I will not deny you', 16, b. 12); then it is used by the Evangelist for the word 'trauern' ('grieve') in 18, b. 9. Moreover, it appears in the extraordinary context of the chorale interspersed with the recitative-arioso, 'O Schmerz! hier zittert das gequälte Herz' (19), for the word 'Plagen' in the line 'Was ist die Ursach aller solcher Plagen?' ('What is the cause of all such torments?'). One could make a sort of theological link between the three instances (Peter's weakness, the disciples' sense of grief, and, finally, the question of

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 352–6. This derives from Quintilian's concept of licence (*licentia*), meaning freedom of speech; its association with dissonance goes back at least as far as Burmeister.

the cause of all the sorrow), namely the concept of human weakness – original sin – in general, but this would be the synthesis of the listener/reader rather than any particular message that the music imposes. Later striking instances include the conclusion of the dramatic chorus ‘Sind Blitze, sind Donner in Wolken verschwunden’ (27b, bb. 134–5), a significant moment in the expressive profile of ‘Erbarme dich’ (39, b. 3), and the Evangelist’s reference to the mocking of the murderers who were crucified with Jesus, on the word ‘gekreuziget’ (58e, b. 65).

What this predominance of the Neapolitan sixth may suggest is that Bach had a particular turn of phrase in his mind when composing the Matthew Passion, one that he put to a number of expressive uses; it is consequently a sort of marker or signature for the Passion as a whole and something that almost helps give the work a sense of consistent identity, independent of specific textual issues. It is clearly a ‘hook’ that draws the listener’s attention, something that seems to carry some significance even if one cannot quite place this. It is part of the wealth of devices by which Bach gives this Passion its sense of ‘meaningfulness’. This gesture is comparatively rare in the John Passion, despite this Passion’s rich array of expressive gestures: it makes a brief appearance in the first aria (7, b. 24), but with nothing of the cadential regularity evident in the first aria of the later Passion. In the recitative where it is associated, for the only time in the John Passion, with a ‘cross’ word (23g, bb. 80–1), it is used again for the final phrase ‘welche heißet auf Ebräisch: Golgatha’ (‘which means in Hebrew, Golgatha’), bb. 86–7. It is also used in the recitative that Bach used in versions II and IV of the John Passion, setting Matthew’s depiction of the earthquake after Jesus’ death, 33, b. 4.⁴⁷ But, in all, it is only in the final chorus of the John Passion that it has a prominent role as a recurring gesture, within the repeating sarabande-like theme (39, b. 9 etc.). It is almost as if this prominent gesture at the end of the first Passion became one of the starting points for the later one.

There are several instances of recognizable melodic phrases recurring in the course of both Passions, which might seem, at first sight, to invite some sort of leitmotivic interpretation. Among the various phrases and gestures that can be associated with Jesus, there is, in the recitative 4, bb. 12–13, of the John Passion a particular melodic turn made out of two phrases (‘Soll ich den Kelch nicht trinken, den mir mein Vater gegeben hat?’ – ‘Should I not drink the cup that my father has given to me?’) which

⁴⁷ See p. 107.

12 Jesus
Bass Soll ich den Kelch nicht trin - ken, den mir mein Va - ter ge -
Continuo 6 6 5

14
ge - - ben hat, den Kelch, den mir mein Va - ter ge - ge - ben hat?

Example 3.3 John Passion, recitative, 4, bb. 12–15

67 Tenor Evangelist Bass Jesus
8 Je - sus ant - wor - te - te: Re - dest du das von dir selbst, o - der ha - bens dir an - de - re von mir ge - sagt?
Continuo 6 6 6 5

Example 3.4 John Passion, recitative, 16e, bb. 67–9

Jesus reuses a little later, in Part 2, 16e, bb. 67–70, ('Redest du das von dir selbst, oder habens dir andere von mir gesagt?' – ('Are you speaking for yourself, or have others told you this of me?')); see [Examples 3.3](#) and [3.4](#)).

There is no obvious semantic connection here, although the two are both questions. However, Jesus reuses the first half of the musical phrase shortly afterwards (18a, b. 5 'Ich bin dazu geboren' – 'I was born for this purpose'), so perhaps we should be associating this phrase somehow with Jesus' 'local accent'. Yet Pilate uses the first half of the phrase for 'Was ich geschrieben habe' ('What I have written') in 25c, bb. 30–1, and the Evangelist presents a contracted version of the two phrases in 29, bb. 3–4 ('Darnach, als Jesus wußte, daß schon alles vollbracht war' – 'After that, since Jesus already knew that all had been accomplished'), and the first phrase recurs again in 36, b. 9 ('Da kamen die Kriegsknechte' – 'Then came the soldiers'). Clearly, then, we are dealing with a turn of phrase in this Passion as a whole (like the Neapolitan sixth in the Matthew Passion), rather than a sort of leitmotiv associated with a specific character or sense (the musical phrase also makes a small, but significant, appearance in the

Matthew Passion, for Peter's bluff statement 'Ich weiß nicht, was du sagest' – 'I know not what you say', in 38a, bb. 7–8).

A sharing of material between the two Passions is evident on a rather larger scale in the case of the first two lines of music for the recitative (6) 'Die Schar aber und der Oberhauptmann' ('But the band and the captain') in the John Passion, which Bach seems to have reused for the very first line of recitative in the Matthew Passion (2) 'Da Jesus diese Rede vollendet hatte' ('When Jesus had finished this discourse'). Here there is no textual connection and even the lengths of the verbal phrases do not match. Yet as a musical line it is euphonious and reasonably striking while at the same time seeming to promise more: the second phrase satisfyingly resolves the first's leap up to the sixth scale degree but without taking the line conclusively down to the lower tonic. Bach probably remembered the experience of this line in performances of the John Passion, where it helps to set a new scene concerning the arrest and binding of Jesus, the topic of which is taken up in the text of the ensuing aria. It serves equally well in the later Passion, creating a new soundworld after the opening chorus, but one that is not too arresting, given that the text refers to sayings of Jesus that come before the Passion narrative begins (the opening recitative of the John Passion is, appropriately, much more striking since this takes us straight into the Gethsemane scene and the arrival of the arresting party).

Lessons learned from parody

The issue of a flexible connection between music and text is brought to a head in the practice of parody – the use of an existing piece (or part of a piece) of music to set a new text. Bach's use of parody was relatively modest compared with some of his contemporaries, but many of his most significant works (e.g. the Christmas Oratorio and the Mass in B Minor) contain considerable amounts of reworked material. The Passions do not contain much obvious use of parody (other than their sporadic reliance on earlier, now lost, Passion settings by Bach) but there is enough repetition of material within them to demonstrate the overall point. The reuse of choruses within the John Passion often relates to a similarity of text: most obviously, the chorus 'Kreuzige' ('Crucify'), 21d, is easily adapted for 'Weg mit dem, kreuzige ihn' ('Away with him, crucify him'), 23d, on account of the recurrence of the word 'kreuzige'; then the sarcastic chorus 'Sei begrüßet, lieber Jüdenkönig' ('We greet you, King of the Jews'), 21b, transforms relatively easily into the more serious 'Schreibe nicht: der

Jüden König' ('Do not write: the King of the Jews'), 25b, on account of the occurrence of the words 'Jüden König' at the same point in the opening phrase. But now the minuet style no longer conveys the false, almost courtly, politeness that it did before, it merely provides a forceful, perhaps spiteful, mood through which the text is conveyed.

The connection between 'Wir haben ein Gesetz' ('We have a law'), 21f, and 'Lässest du diesen los' ('If you let this man go'), 23b, is rather more tenuous. There is at least a strong connection between the second line of text (the third 'subject' in terms of the way the counterpoint works) 'denn er hat sich selbst zu Gottes Sohn gemacht' ('for he has made himself God's son') in 21f, and 'denn wer sich zum Könige machet, der ist wider den Kaiser' ('for whoever makes himself a king, is against Caesar') in 23b, since the two texts refer to what the crowd believed to be the pretensions of Jesus – to be the son of God in the first instance, and the King of the Jews in the second. The connection between the first lines of text is not immediately evident for 'Wir haben ein Gesetz, und nach dem Gesetz soll er sterben' ('We have a law, and by that law he should die') and 'Lässest du diesen los, so bist du des Kaisers Freund nicht' ('If you let this man go you are no friend of Caesar'), but both could perhaps be related to forms of law or national allegiance (Jewish in the first and Roman in the second). Most interesting of all, though, is the fact that the melisma on 'sterben' ('die') in the first chorus, which seems to illustrate the word so very clearly, becomes a melisma on 'Freund' (friend) in the second. It seems to work just as well in the second instance, even if the senses of the two words are almost antithetical. The music is clearly a rhetorical device of emphasis and extension but entirely without essential semantic content.

Examples of parody on a broader scale from elsewhere in Bach's oeuvre show clearly that the composer could not possibly have countenanced an indelible relationship between music and text. Indeed, there can be some striking differences of mood and sense: the line in the opening chorus of Cantata 102 'Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben,' regarding the way God 'strikes' believers in compelling them towards faith – 'Du schlägest sie, aber sie fühlen nicht' ('You strike them, but they do not feel it') – is set to an appropriately staccato fugal phrase, with evocative rests between each 'strike'. Yet, with very little alteration, this becomes the 'Christe eleison' ('Christ have mercy') for the Mass in G minor, BWV 235. Its distinction from the previous music in the movement highlights the difference between 'Kyrie eleison' and 'Christe eleison'. Most shocking of all, perhaps, is the aria 'Schlafe, mein Liebster' from the Christmas Oratorio. This music was originally written for the rather dubious character

'Wollust' in Cantata 213, 'Laßt uns sorgen, laßt uns wachen' ('Hercules at the Crossroads'). In this aria ('Schlafe, mein Liebster'), Wollust is tempting the young Hercules with the line 'Sleep my dearest, and take your ease, Follow the enticement of inflamed thoughts. Taste the pleasure of the wanton breast and know no bounds'.⁴⁸ The Christmas Oratorio text begins with exactly the same line, but the sentiments are entirely different. This is a lullaby for the infant Jesus: 'Sleep my dearest, enjoy your rest, then awake, that all may increase! Refresh the breast, feel the pleasure with which we gladden our hearts!'⁴⁹ Were one to believe that the relationship between words and music was one of sacred significance, this example would be interpreted as an act of blasphemy on Bach's part, since a musical evocation of wanton sexual licence has become associated with the infant Jesus.

This example suggests overwhelmingly that we need to find a way of accounting for musical meaningfulness that is reducible neither to a stable semantic equivalence between music and text, nor to the role of directly bringing out some deeper, or contrasting, meaning. The notion of music working as a rhetoric may well be more serviceable in this regard, provided it is shorn of the sense that rhetoric somehow provides the key or code to musical meaning. Hobbes defines rhetoric particularly well for this purpose in *De Cive* (1642), when he states that rhetoric consists in the engagement of metaphors that 'fit' the moment concerned to thoughts and passions already in the mind, those that have been preformed by received opinion and experience. Indeed, given that even the common usages of words are not consistently applied to identical thoughts, this ambiguity enables the rhetorician to use metaphors to represent ideas or actions already latent in the listeners' minds.⁵⁰ Such slippage must surely be far greater with music than with words, but it may be precisely this that allows music to mirror, clarify and amplify pre-existent affects with such immediacy. It operates in metaphorical relation to a meaning that it never actually had, but which we somehow presuppose.

Music as currency and exchange

One telling example of how the apparent meaning (or at least, significance) of musical material can change is provided by the connection

⁴⁸ Translated from Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach with their Librettos in German-English Parallel Text*, revised and trans. Richard D. P. Jones (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 821.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 119–20 (modified).

⁵⁰ Robert P. Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 80–1.

29

Es taugt - - - nicht, es taugt nicht, daß wir sie in - - - den Got-tes-ka-sten le - - - - -

Es taugt nicht, daß wir sie in - - - den Got-tes-ka-sten le - - - - -

Continuo

5 4 6 5 4 6 4 3 6 5 6 5 9 3

32

- - - - - gen, denn es ist Blut - - - - - geld, denn es ist Blut - geld.

- - - - - gen, denn es ist Blut - - - - - geld, denn es ist Blut - geld.

7 4 6 4+ 6 4 5 6 4+ 5 7 5

Example 3.5 Matthew Passion, recitative, 41c, bb. 29–35

between the passage for the two priests in the recitative 41c and the aria, 42, ‘Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder!’ in the Matthew Passion. After Judas has thrown the pieces of silver he received for betraying Jesus into the temple and then hanged himself, the priests remark that this money cannot go into the temple coffers because it is blood money. Their lines and that of the continuo soon pick up a dactylic rhythm (Printz’s and Walther’s *figura corta*,⁵¹ a pattern of a quaver and two semiquavers, here with conjunct notes or an alternating mordant figure); in the last three bars there is also the hint of the same sort of rhythm at the two next-slower metrical levels (Example 3.5). This patterning is immediately taken up in the ensuing aria where its main rhythmic form is particularly prominent (and it is again hinted at in other metrical levels, including the next-faster metrical level, in its anapaestic form, Example 3.6).

Both texts concerned are linked by the notion of money. For the priests, the money they gave Judas has already done its job and cannot be accepted back; for the personage of the aria, there is the desperate bid for the return of Jesus, in exchange for the money that has been thrown back by the ‘lost

⁵¹ Bartel, *Musica Poetica*, p. 234.

42. Aria

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for Violin I (Vln I), the middle for Violin II & Viola (Vln II & Vla), and the bottom for Continuo. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The Continuo staff includes figured bass notation with figures such as 6 5, 3 6, 4 2, 6 5, 6 4, 3, 6, 6 5, 4 2, 6 5, 6 4, and 5. The music is in a 4/4 time signature and features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing trills (tr).

Example 3.6 Matthew Passion, aria 'Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder', 42, bb. 1–4

son'. Yet, as we already know, the return of the money does not secure the return of Jesus, its value having changed since the day before. Musically, the token shared between recitative and aria is of course the rhythmic pattern, a sort of musical coinage that seems to saturate the texture as the aria proceeds (the semiquaver and even demisemiquaver patterns can be heard as outgrowths of the initial pattern, as if the money has multiplied itself as the currency is fatally devalued). Yet this musical token of exchange clearly does not have a single, stable meaning or value, even if it provides a recognizable connection between the two movements. Its value is entirely dependent on who is singing or listening and it also changes over time. It clearly no longer works in the manner of a direct exchange, where music and meaning can simply be swapped back and forth.

Seeing music's potential for signifying meaning as something parallel to the way currency operates brings us back to some of the fundamental historical issues of Bach's environment. This was a time when the direct connection between goods, services and work through a barter economy was being broken down by the increasing reliance on money as an element of exchange with an abstract value that can go up or down according to a plethora of circumstances. Various figures and motives in Bach's music can be used to 'buy' a remarkable variety of meanings, but such meanings cannot be indelibly fixed by the 'seller' (composer or performer) and are partially contingent on the 'buyer' (the listener or reader). Just as with currency, the same token can have a different value according to time and place. Obviously, this analogy can only be pushed so far, but it does help to emphasize the sort of productive uncertainty that is typical of early modernity: something artificial and manmade facilitates a rich and complex field of meaning and signification, but at the cost of certainty and stability of value. Moreover, the artificial construct acquires a level of



Example 3.7 Heinrich Schütz, 'O quam tu pulchra es' (*Symphoniae sacrae* I, 1629), opening, bb. 1–14

autonomy that could not have been predicted by its originator, its values and significance multiplying almost from the moment it has been finished.

This historical development is illustrated by comparing Bach's music with some of the music of his most distinguished predecessors, much of which uses the same sorts of rhetorical devices and illustrative figures. Heinrich Schütz's music, particularly that in the 'modern' style (i.e. following Monteverdi's *seconda prattica*, by which the music serves the words rather than vice versa), presents the text with a clarity and directness that was unprecedented in German composition. 'O quam tu pulchra es' (*Symphoniae sacrae* I, 1629) provides a more useful comparison with Bach's Passions than Schütz's own Passion settings, which are in the traditionally austere style favoured by Luther for the Passion. Taken from the Song of Songs, this text has something in common with Picander's poetry for the Matthew Passion, which alludes to the Song of Songs in several places, borrowing from it directly in 'Ach nun ist mein Jesus hin' (30).

Several rhetorical figures are immediately recognizable (see [Example 3.7](#)): first the *saltus duriusculus* (harsh leap) to 'pulchra' giving expression to the word 'fair', something further emphasized by the repetition of text and the holding of the second 'pulchra'. Then follows the list of amorous epithets ('O my friend, my dove' etc.) which all take the same poetic form, together with the same musical pattern. This repetition is enhanced by the fact that the sequence rises (anabasis, climax, gradatio),⁵² suggesting the poet's increasing fervour, aiming towards the top of the phrase ('Immaculata'), and lengthening the notes with the hemiola cadence. As with Bach, none of these figures carries intrinsic meaning, but later on in the piece Schütz uses word-painting devices that are both totally clear and reusable: the circle figure for the beloved's neck ('collum', likened to David's tower)

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 179–80, 220–5.

and, later, in Part II ('Veni de libano'), a nearly identical figure for 'coronaberis' ('you shall be crowned').

In all, then, Schütz's rhetorical and pictorial devices are no more fixed in meaning than Bach's, yet because of the direct layout of the text together with the instrumental parts as generally subservient to the vocal parts, there is no particular reason to consider the text-setting ambiguous or multivalent. It would be extremely difficult to imagine this music being used for a parody text, as Bach could do with his arias and choruses. The music is far too closely associated with the twists and turns of its text (in this respect, it is more analogous to Bach's recitative writing, which, with the exceptional case noted above concerning borrowing between the two Passions, rarely provides material for reuse). The relation of music to text is perhaps closer to the concept of a barter economy: the exchange between textual and musical figure is local and quite intimate, even if the components are entirely conventional. But the fit is sufficiently customized to the specific purpose that it would be easier to compose afresh than to reuse the substance of this music for a new text. Although Bach uses many of the same basic devices as Schütz (the obvious historical differences in melodic and harmonic practice notwithstanding), these have acquired considerably more autonomy through their absorption into more strongly profiled musical forms and textures. Even if the composer were to have intended a fixed meaning in such pieces, the very substance of the music would render meaning more fluid and open to unexpected expansion. While Schütz's music invites the listener to follow the text, its images and attendant emotions as an immediate experience in real time, Bach's seems to invite a search for a greater range of meanings and associations as the music proceeds. And this invitation seems to remain open even if the text is changed.

Towards a theory of 'meaningfulness'

What is it, then, that makes Bach's Passions and their possible meanings matter? There must be something about them that resonates with the consciousness of those who have valued them throughout the various phases of reception, something that circumvents the shield of historical distance. The 'meaningfulness' of this music may well relate to movements in modernity that are to some degree still current. What we need to look for are ways in which the music draws in the listener to anticipate a type of meaning, ways in which the music somehow sets 'meaningfulness' in

motion without actually fixing a specific meaning. The answer may well lie in the way various factors combine rather than in any single component carrying individual significance.

To begin with, there is the confluence of a number of historical factors at the time when Bach was writing his Passions. The most culturally specific element would be the word- and rhetoric-oriented nature of the musical substance, which Bach had inherited from the German tradition; many of the details and gestures contain echoes of the sort of music Schütz and his generation were producing a century before. Second, there is the growth in the use of musical formalizing procedures in the latter half of the seventeenth century, by which music can have a shape and trajectory independent of any textual considerations. With this also comes the tremendous growth in instrumental participation, so that instruments can present a complex of musical ideas and gestures that go well beyond whatever can be developed in the voices alone. Finally, there is Bach's enduring interest in the variety of historical techniques of musical construction that he had inherited and saw developing around him, from the stricter forms of polyphony to more modern, fashionable styles. His attitude to music seems to have been one of combination and assimilation, in such a way that the meanings and resonances of the individual elements are somehow changed and recharged in the process. As Reinhard Strohm observes in a perceptive study of the multiple references of the Mass in B Minor, 'compound references rarified the product', the accumulation of meaningfulness leading to a curious defamiliarization. Yet, rather than necessarily aiming for a music that could be understood by no one, Bach may have been devising a type of music to which many people from a variety of backgrounds could relate, on at least one level.⁵³ Perhaps a practical consideration of this kind helped inaugurate a type of music that, within modernity, seemed to transcend the ordinary.

None of this development is unique to Bach, but the intensity with which he pursued this sense of combination and assimilation was extraordinary. His obvious predilection for combining musical lines and developing contrapuntal strategies clearly worked on many other levels besides. The 'meaningfulness' achieved through the combination and confluence of various elements is particularly important in Bach's Passions owing to their overriding dialogic nature, something which underlies so much of the material in both works and becomes overt in the textual and

⁵³ Reinhard Strohm, 'Transgression, Transcendence and Metaphor – The "Other Meanings" of the B-Minor Mass', *Understanding Bach*, 1 (2006), 49–68, esp. 62.

antiphonal structure of the Matthew Passion. Most elements in this music have their origin in historical particulars, from the metaphysical perfection of polyphony, through the rhetorically influenced gestures from the texted music of the seventeenth century, traditional emblems of lament (e.g. chromatic progressions), to more modern expressive gestures such as Neapolitan sixths and diminished sevenths. While the individual gesture (e.g. the traditional chromatic emblem of lament) might still seem to speak directly to us, it is also heard speaking to other factors in the musical fabric and consequently seems to acquire a dynamic 'meaningfulness' on its own terms. By uniting within such a strongly controlled harmonic context, all these elements seem to operate successfully together, indeed to converse with one another within the forms of aria, dances, contrapuntal procedures and the tonal and melodic trajectory of recitative. In other words, a form of conversation seems to be taking place even before we join in, one that can gain a sense of startling potency as soon as we begin to bring in our own perspectives.

Taking the opening chorus of the John Passion as an example, it is easy to isolate the various elements that Bach had inherited from previous compositions, ones that can be interpreted rhetorically as increasing the general persuasiveness of the music, and some that might even carry certain connotations. The opening gesture in the upper strings was sometimes labelled *circulo mezzo* (half circle), which brings with it a sense of repetition and return (see the discussion of cyclic time on pp. 99–101). There are even some examples of the full, eight-note circle (*circulo*) such as in the violin 1 part in the latter half of b. 13 and b. 15 (the net result is the same: the figure returns to the opening note in each case). The sense of circle is also played out at a broader level in the way the opening ritornello is harmonically organized by the circle of fifths to return to G minor for the opening chorus entry in b. 19. But the concept of circle is by no means the only element, since it is accompanied in the continuo instruments by a pulsating figure (often coloured by the viola part). This relates to the device of 'tremolo' and is associated both with vocal tremolo and a form of bow vibrato. This was a common device in German writing from the late seventeenth century onwards, and was often used to imply a perturbed emotion, one almost directly imitating palpitations of the heart (compare, for instance, Jesus' deepest expression of his soul's disquiet in the Matthew Passion, 18, bb. 11–15, where he is accompanied by all four string parts playing the tremolo device).

Already, then, if we infer relatively conventional meanings for these elements, there is a sense that the circle (eternal return) idea is inflected by

Flauto traverso I
Oboe I
Flauto traverso II
Oboe II

Vln I & II

Vla

Continuo

Figured bass notation in the Continuo part: 6 5, 8 4, 7 6 4 2, 5 4, 8, 9 8 6 4, 9 7 4, 7.

Example 3.8 John Passion, chorus ‘Herr, unser Herscher’, 1, bb. 1–4

the feeling of human disquiet (and vice versa). Added to this are the lines for oboe, doubled by flutes, which with their interlocking gestures mimic the duetting of high voices, a texture that was essential in many early operas (at least before the genre became dominated by solo da capo arias) and which had also found a place in the genre of the trio sonata (see [Example 3.8](#)). This is the quintessential dialogic texture of Baroque music, bringing with it all the connotations of human interaction such as conversation, pain and even physical love; the continual suspensions certainly provide a direct sense of physicality.

The three strands I have described interact in a way that defies direct description. It is certainly possible (if somewhat unwieldy) to explain this music by combining its various elements, say, as the evocation of a human conversation, involving some sense of painful or erotic interaction, inflected by a sense of underlying unease and somehow combined with the notion of circularity or inevitability. Indeed, I could add another connotation derived from the simultaneous working of these three

elements, suggested by the three levels of crotchet, quaver and semiquaver movement, namely, the mechanical nature of the music. The elements interlock as if in one integrated machine, each division of the beat bringing a different idiom and perhaps a sense of the permutational potential of each figure. This mechanical interlocking of elements is of a piece with the metaphysical outlook of Bach's age (most famously articulated by Leibniz), by which each element relates to the others through a sort of pre-established harmony of metrical and tonal factors. However, while the mechanistic character of the instrumental opening to the first chorus of the John Passion could well be related to the conceptions of the age, its precise meaning in the context of the John Passion is ambiguous. On the one hand, it could relate to the inevitability of the events outlined in its narrative, by suggesting a sort of relentlessness (the events being set in motion before the beginning of time, as John's Gospel suggests). On the other, it could point to the inhuman nature of the proceedings, the protagonists driven mechanically by rules rather than human compassion. Or it could simply point to the way the music seemingly encompasses the entirety of its tonal and metrical space, a memory of the way music was traditionally associated with the structure of the cosmos and the movement of the heavenly bodies. In all, then, we derive a sort of counterpoint of meanings and connotations from this music, even before the text is introduced. All the elements are alluring and seem to invite some form of interpretation, but each is inflected by the others. Moreover, tying them down to their various connotations, as I have tried to do above, seems to bring only the beginnings of an explanation, one that is surely impoverished in comparison with the actual experience of the music.

Indeed, the entry of the texted voices, far from bringing some sort of meaning directly into focus and perhaps rendering some of the potential meanings redundant, adds yet another factor, namely the affirmation of the Lord's 'glory in all the lands'. Nothing in the introduction could have prepared us for this, surely antithetical to our expectations (other than perhaps of the idea of relentless inevitability, or the totality of musical space). Immediately, the verbal sentiment is inflected by what we have heard so far and, although we might be able to generate some theologically plausible meanings (e.g. Christ's glory comes paradoxically at the expense of his Passion and suffering), the richness of the counterpoint of possible meanings goes far beyond any specific sense.

Then there is the way in which the vocal parts relate to the pre-existing instrumental 'machine': initially, the word 'Herr' is heard in relief, as if in direct contrast to the ritornello material (the rhetorical figure of

emphasis),⁵⁴ but within two bars the vocal parts seem to be integrated into the texture of semiquaver circle motives (b. 21), as if to imply that they could always have been present. Is this a dialogue of diverse, perhaps antithetical, elements, then, or one that assumes some sort of prior agreement? And is the conversation set up between the texted voices and instrumental ritornello the same as that which already seemed to be implied by the two woodwind lines? Or is there a suggestion of several interlocking sets of conversations running simultaneously and somehow harmonized within the tonal space of the music? Initially, in line with my earlier Schütz example, we might be tempted to associate the figure on the word 'Herrscher' (ruler) with an emblem of power (say, a crown), but before long (b. 30) it is also associated with 'Landen'. Moreover, the word 'Herrscher' becomes a syncopation, from b. 33, while this same syncopation sets the words 'deine Passion' ('your Passion') in b. 59. In turn, the word 'Landen' is also sung to disjunct quavers (b. 28) and later with paired quavers, conjunct and slurred (b. 45). While the phrase 'dessen Ruhm' ('whose praise') is initially set to two quavers and a crotchet (bb. 27–8), it later sets off a fugato passage, with a semiquaver melisma on 'Landen' (beginning bb. 49–50); the concept of praise seems to be spreading and spawning imitation.

In short, there is no consistent way in which specific words are tied to specific motivic symbols, but perhaps many listeners have some inkling of a memory that music might at one time have done this (or, more accurately, was believed to have done this). Walter Benjamin's comment about allegory might be applicable here: 'Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.'⁵⁵ Thus, if we intuit some sort of allegorical significance in this music, it brings with it the sense that an original, complete, meaning is no longer within our reach.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it is possible to imagine that each new figure for any particular word brings a new nuance. Moreover, the fact that different words may share the same figuration (most particularly, the semiquaver circle figure) means that they become associated in a way that might not otherwise have occurred. The crucial point here, then, is that both the opening musical complex and the text increase the interpretative

⁵⁴ This figure generally refers to some form of emphasis of a particular word; Bartel, *Musica Poetica*, pp. 251–5.

⁵⁵ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 178.

⁵⁶ Jürgen Habermas relates modernity itself to the search for traces of a form of writing that no longer holds out any prospect of a meaningful whole as a book of nature or Scripture; Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity – Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 1987), p. 165.

possibilities through their mutual interaction and inflection. As soon as one begins to identify emotional or semantic connotations, even at the most basic level, these are infinitely nuanced by their combination with other elements. The 'meaningfulness' of the music is generated through the way the elements interact and requires only the lightest of hermeneutic touches on the part of the listener to be set in motion.

This is a conversation that, by its very nature, is ultimately beyond the composer's control, since he is using materials that can bring their own pre-existing meanings and resonances, and which, in new combinations, acquire contextual connotations that could not possibly have been predicted. In this respect, Bach's music shares something of the polyphonic quality of the modern novel, which was in the process of development during Bach's lifetime (although its specifically German flowering is most closely associated with the generation after Bach). Although the Passions could hardly be termed novels, there is perhaps a sense in which Bach shows the musical analogue to the sort of novelistic thinking that writers were beginning to employ in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Mikhail Bakhtin's approach to the novel suggests many of the same ideas of combining diverse languages and idioms that I have proposed for Bach's musical practice. Bakhtin defines the novel as something beyond a specific genre or set of forms and more an attitude that can pervade other, more fixed or apparently ossified forms; in other words, it relates to a way of thinking rather than specific formal processes. What seems to distinguish it specifically from traditional genres is its tendency towards continual re-thinking and re-evaluating, diverting the energy of genres that habitually ponder and justify the past towards the future; this gives the novel a sort of enduring modernity that does not necessarily dissipate over time.⁵⁷ While Bakhtin by no means confines the concept of the novel to that of the modern era, he suggests that the novel always brings with it the sense of a new era, one in which all other major genres are inherited as fixed, somehow completed, forms; in turn, these pre-existent genres are to a certain extent novelized.⁵⁸ This may parallel the way Bach's music frequently uses gestures from earlier forms of music but somehow injects a new charge. Even opera, an unequivocally 'modern' genre that Bach inherited, is 'novelized' if we become aware of the plethora of voices from

⁵⁷ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination – Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–6.

past and present, and which are by no means confined to the first-person speech of traditional dramatic presentation (see [Chapter 4](#)).

As I have suggested for Bach, the novel in Bakhtin's conception sits on the border between a dominant language that is already essentially complete and new forms of expression that contain no certain limitation and which can lead to a 'tower-of-Babel' mixing of languages.⁵⁹ Indeed, the early modern novel might resonate with much about music in the seventeenth century: first, there was the underlying system of counterpoint that had reached a level of comprehensive codification by the end of the sixteenth century; then there were the countless ways in which this background language was modified, extended or even subverted, so that musical styles diversified on a scale that had never been possible before. With this diversification and increasing distance from the assumed 'natural' order of music came the sense of the necessary artificiality of music – something that could be viewed as a positive aspect (just at the same time that Leibniz was pointing towards the necessary artificiality of human languages).⁶⁰

As I have suggested in my analysis of the opening chorus of the John Passion, many of the component elements are heard in their own contextual dialogue, which continually modifies their apparent received meanings (Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia'). Whatever Bach's specific intentions, the consequences of the combination are never predictable and always open to further nuance, beyond the expectations of the original readership. Bakhtin conceives of the novel as a system of intersecting planes, its sense lying in what seems to come close to a verbal form of counterpoint.⁶¹ The effect is primarily contextual, meaning that much of the sense or resonance could not be found within the individual components alone.⁶² Of course, novelistic counterpoint must be only virtual in comparison to the actual simultaneity afforded by music – each strand can only be heard individually, in linear sequence with the others – so there is a sense in which music fits Bakhtin's theory more directly than the novel itself. But what is so telling about Bakhtin's insight is the suggestion that the novel captures something of the dialogic nature of actual human interaction, by which speakers know about each other and structure their dialogue with a sense of their mutual knowledge. In other words, literature acquires a sense of the real presence of human subjectivities, ones that are set off and

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 278. ⁶⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 415–16.

⁶¹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 48–9. ⁶² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 458.

animated by their dialogic relation to one another. When we hear a Bach Passion setting, there is almost the sense that the first listeners are already hearing the work from within it, and that it is only a small step for us to join in too. As Rousseau perceptively put it, music is of interest 'precisely because it brings man closer to man and always gives us some idea of those who are like us'.⁶³

The immediacy of the novelistic genre is such that the world represented in the novel emerges from that of the present reader; indeed it shares something of the dynamics of our world even if it might ultimately effect a change or alienation from that world. Bakhtin terms it a living utterance which 'cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads' in any particular present. Understanding is impossible without an active form of response, the two merging and continuing to condition one other; this form of active understanding is presupposed by the author who orientates what he writes towards active readership.⁶⁴ This parallels something of the way Bach managed to combine traditional operatic practice with the type of active participation he would have presumed of a Lutheran congregation, thus engineering the experience as a way of cultivating faith.

Of course, there are many ways in which 'novelistic thought' must have been anathema to the conscious intentions and functions underlying Bach's Passions. After all, the Gospel text would have represented an absolute form of thought which brings the sorts of foundational truth claims endemic to mythological literary modes. From this point of view, any setting of Gospel narrative would be closer to the epic genre than the novelistic (and the Gospels obviously lack the multilayered social structures of the modern novel). But this epic starting point is subverted by the free poetry set in the arias and choruses, which account for well over half of the material in each Passion. The voices from the present function as a 'novelization' of the traditional epic genre of the sung Passion. This was a process Bach shared with most other contemporary composers of Passion settings and which (if the influence of B. H. Brockes, the author of the most popular poetic text based on the Passion in the first half of the eighteenth century, is anything to go by) was very much influenced by new literary movements.

⁶³ Translation (from *Essai sur l'origine des langues*) from Julia Simon, 'Rousseau and Aesthetic Modernity: Music's Power of Redemption', *Eighteenth-century Music* 2/1 (2005), 41–56, p. 54.

⁶⁴ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 276–7, 282.

Some conclusions

If the polyphonic nature of Bach's Passions means that the textual components, at least as individual entities, are destabilized or rendered in flux, what must be happening to the fundamental sacred purposes of these works? This brings us back directly to the nub of the questions addressed in this chapter. For, in music that brings so many different levels of potential semantic significance and affective power, there is no necessary limit to what it can signify. It seems designed to draw in the listener's attention to a degree that must have been the envy of any preacher or exegete in Bach's time.⁶⁵ Its counterpoint of gesture, resonance, remembrance and image provides a 'hook' to the listener that is difficult to rationalize. The dialogic nature of so much of this music seems to set up a dialectic of question-and-answer that draws in the listener from the start.⁶⁶

The sympathetic cleric of Bach's environment might surely have appreciated that anyone approaching these works with the 'correct' dogma and orthodox theological imagery would find their religious beliefs and experiences amply actualized and exponentially amplified by the music. But the obvious Pietist disquiet about complex music in general, and Passions in particular, is absolutely telling.⁶⁷ If music is thrown into anything but a subservient relation to Scripture – however sincere the intentions might be in serving it – the meanings become more diffuse precisely in the process of being intensified. While both musicians and literary scholars in Lutheranism during the century before Bach could correctly see rhetorical elaboration as a way of deriving a richer meaning from Scripture, there is now a sense that this music has gone well beyond the bounds of rhetoric. It has become a text and happening in its own right, one that brings its own conversations and historical resonances. If the verbal text still has an overriding presence, this is as much in the sound, friction and emotional effect of its words as in any semantic stability. In a sense, Bach was making the Passion narrative more 'real' than it could have sounded before – indeed the 'Word' itself is enlivened in ways that seem to underline its Johannine foundational role in all creation – but this new-found sense of presence comes at the expense of definitive meaning.

⁶⁵ This point is made by John Eliot Gardiner in his forthcoming study of Bach, 'The Incurable Cantor'.

⁶⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 466.

⁶⁷ *NBR*, pp. 326–7 and Tanya Kevorkian, *Baroque Piety: Religion, Society, and Music in Leipzig, 1650–1750* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 40, 215.

Turning, finally, back to Ricoeur's poles of the hermeneutic endeavour, it is surely clear that the inherently 'suspicious' reading is not essentially different from a 'faithful' one.⁶⁸ Simplistically, one could say that the latter pole takes the conscious intentions of the age as the norm for interpretation while the former takes the unconscious prejudices, but both are equally literalistic and reductive. Indeed the only way of evaluating the results of a hermeneutically confident form of interpretation is not on whether they are more or less true but on whether or not one approves of them.⁶⁹ Both approaches advocate the notion that music is essentially decipherable in terms of its stance towards faith or in its articulation of social phenomena, exercising a sort of 'clandestine mysticism',⁷⁰ and each remains closed to the polyphonic openness of this music. On the other hand, given that these two approaches are so often manifest in relation to hearing or studying this music, it hardly makes sense to insist that they are consequently to be ignored: 'We are hermeneutic creatures through and through', affirms Karol Berger.⁷¹ The fact that the music has a dialogic character that is crucially dependent on the listener, involving him or her from the start, means that a faithful or suspicious reading is always a latent possibility.⁷² In this sense, the potential effects of this music could be much more insidious than if its role were merely as cultural code or cipher (in which case, it could easily be read, analysed, and dispensed with, if found to be harmful). This music is not, in itself, a force for good or bad, but rather a remarkably potent means of developing the plethora of moral

⁶⁸ This point is demonstrated remarkably well by Hoffmann-Axthelm's line of argument in suggesting that the John Passion demonstrates the 'Perfidia Iudaica'. This leads seamlessly from a consideration of the theologically based interpretations of Friedrich Smend and Werner Breig to her own study of anti-Judaic terminology stemming from Luther, and Bach's choice of the text 'Durch dein Gefängnis' as the central axis within the 'Jewish' choruses. The conclusion is that this piece of Christian 'freedom' contrasts with the 'captivity' of the rigid counterpoint of the Jews, the whole exemplifying a musical 'emblem' in the sense of Baroque 'Sinnbildkunst'; 'Bach und die *Perfidia Iudaica*', esp. pp. 46–53.

⁶⁹ Carolyn Abbate, 'Music – Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Spring 2004), 505–36, esp. 519.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 513, 517, 521: '[hermeneutics] is a mysticism that will demonize mystery at every turn'; see also Abbate, 'Cipher and Performance'.

⁷¹ Karol Berger, 'Musicology According to Don Giovanni, or: Should We Get Drastic?', *Journal of Musicology* 22/3 (2005), 490–501, esp. 497.

⁷² For Richard Taruskin, the anti-Semitic aspects of Bach's John Passion in its original context were doubtless innocuous (at least in themselves), but – if there is a problem to be found – it lies in the very fact that the work has been revived and brought before audiences very different from Bach's, ones that have been influenced by complex histories of their own. Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 2, *The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 389–90.

or spiritual stances that we might bring to it. If works like Bach's Passions have anything to teach us from a hermeneutic point of view, it is surely that our understanding and response to stories, beliefs and fragments from the past is part of an active process rooted in time, history and cultural circumstance. The Passions' particular role might lie in the way they render the urge to engage with such an activity especially tempting.

4 | The voices we hear and the construction of narrative authority

The question of whether the music ‘means’ anything in relation to its text leads to another, related, question: whose voice are we hearing? Is such a voice convincing, consistent or even truthful? Does music provide a platform for multiple voices or does it, in itself, constitute a particular voice behind that of the text? Do text and music together constitute parts of the same voice or complex of voices? Obviously, these questions rely on some of the issues brought up by previous chapters, namely, subjectivity, the experience and manipulation of time, and hermeneutics, but they also provide a stronger focus on the role of the listener as essential to the way voices are constructed and perceived. While [Chapter 3](#) was concerned with the way meaning could be constructed, this chapter addresses the various sources of authority lying behind the discourse.

Consideration of the listener moreover includes the need to account for the portfolio of beliefs and expectations that he or she might bring to the performance. There are perhaps three broadly defined categories by which listeners have historically inferred who or what is speaking in a Bach Passion. First, the music might mirror and amplify the Gospel text, together with the various interpretative glosses, which to a believer might mean that it is representing (or at least serving) the voice of God. Bach and his librettists are thus the servants of the Evangelist concerned, bringing his voice and insights to life, and – in the manner of a Bible commentary – providing spontaneous interpretation. It is as if the Gospel text provokes a deep and immediate response through its very utterance and tangible presence. Certainly, this way of hearing might well coincide to some degree with Bach’s intentions, particularly in view of the way both Passions are divided (largely by the placing of their arias) along the lines of Lutheran Bible commentaries.¹ This general approach puts both Bach

¹ Principally Johannes Olearius’s Bible commentary; see Don O. Franklin, ‘The Libretto of Bach’s John Passion and the Doctrine of Reconciliation: an Historical Perspective’, in A. A. Clement (ed.), *Das Blut Jesu und die Lehre von der Versöhnung im Werk Johann Sebastian Bachs* (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1995), pp. 179–203, and ‘The Role of the “Actus Structure” in the Libretto of J. S. Bach’s Matthew Passion’ in Daniel Zager (ed.), *Music and Theology – Essays in Honor of Robin A. Leaver* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 2007),

and his music in the position of ventriloquist, the singers brought to life as media for the Word but also themselves responding, seemingly spontaneously, to the powerful effects of that Word. Many scholars writing from a theological standpoint have consequently gone on to describe some of the many ways in which Bach and his librettist together behave like a preacher – someone who effectively narrates a text, highlights allusions and connections (especially from the Old Testament), draws a moral from each scene in the story and seeks to effect a spiritual transformation in the minds of his listeners. A preacher adopts (and, in this case, co-ordinates) a plethora of voices in order to present a message that is believed to be essentially true and of enduring value. It is a matter of bringing the Word to life, confirming and reinforcing a message that is already there.

Second, the Passions could be heard as a composer's unique reaction to the text and its associated theology and emotions, together with the deepest of encounters with the styles, techniques and latent possibilities in the music he knew. If the notion of the Passions as both representing and actualizing the voice of God were indeed a common perception in Bach's own time, the idea that they represent the specific voice of Bach would have been particularly appealing to the Romantic movement and the environment in which the Passions were rediscovered in the nineteenth century. The notion of religious truth could, where desired, be retained, but now as a sort of universal truth accessible through the unique insights of genius.

Finally, to those of a more formalist persuasion, the music might represent itself as a structure of fascinating variety and perfection. Here the biblical text and its commentaries would be more the 'pretext' than the essential content of the work. The composer remains the major, if largely metaphorical force of identity and unity, but more as a function of the work – evidenced by its quality and design – than as a specific historical personage. In this conception, the question of a human or Godly voice may well begin to fall away, since the music is its own voice, which the singers merely bring to life as secondary creators. The substitution of art for religion seems all but complete.

These three categories, together with the infinite number of interactions there might be between them, are interesting because they identify different types of listeners, ones who will hear exactly the same performance in

different ways. Although these three conceptions might be most strongly associated with specific periods or areas of reception, it is surely also the case that each could have been possible at any time. After all, in Bach's time there was still the residual sense of music as representing and amplifying essential proportions of the cosmos, so that music could indeed be heard as its own voice, in addition to its role in rendering real the voice of God or representing the composer's view or spiritual intuition.

While it is possible to find useful insights from each of these three groups of listeners – the theological, composerly and formalist – every approach inevitably brings its own pitfalls. Those who adopt an exclusively theological approach are unlikely to discern any of the unique possibilities that music (and not just Bach's) affords; provided the voice of the biblical Evangelist is heard and brought alive, it does not essentially matter what music accompanies it. A preacher is not set on presenting his own voice or presence since he is performing God's work rather than his own (officially at least, if not always in practice). Even if we must accept that Bach undoubtedly shared something of this attitude, the resulting conception could well miss many of the musical qualities involved (which must surely lie behind the survival of this repertory in the first place).

On the other hand, those who adopt an entirely structural approach would surely have to admit that something was missing if the text were ignored, even if they could not attribute any independent value to the text. There is surely also something disingenuous in claiming that music has some sort of structural power and identity apart from human considerations, as if it represented a form of order and truth prior to the messy contingencies of life. And while the tendency to hear the voice of Bach may give our reading or listening a sort of consistency, this is actually not necessarily so very different from attributing that voice to God or the Evangelist. The cult of genius tends to accord a degree of omniscience and omnipotence to its heroes that not only goes beyond the humanly possible, but also ignores the way a creative intellect must work and develop over time, in a piecemeal and self-critical manner, appropriating ideas from a variety of sources for ever-changing ends. In other words, although I have outlined three broad categories by which listeners might identify the voice(s) they hear in Bach's Passions, I would suggest that these alone are inadequate in terms of what it is possible to hear and, most important, the way the music can work upon us in performance. Much of the fascination with these works, in a variety of historical contexts, might lie in the multiple authority of the various voices heard (and indeed constructed) in the course of performance.

Given the rich and vivid texts of Bach's Passions, one might expect there to be a clear-cut division of voice and that each personage (whether a historical character, narrator or 'modern' character) is relatively distinct. Yet the verbal text is more complex than it first appears, particularly given its combination of Gospel text, chorales and modern poetry. It is hardly like the (nominally) single-authored text of much opera and oratorio, even though the John Passion libretto borrows liberally from the libretto designed for oratorio use by B. H. Brockes, 'Der für die Sünde der Welt gemartete und sterbende Jesus'. Moreover, when this multi-authored text is coupled with music that is extremely rich in its gestural and tonal language, the question of who is speaking becomes even more ambiguous, even if the music seems to harmonize all the elements together into what can be heard as a unitary utterance.

This brings me back to the approach I have outlined in the previous chapter, one that hinges on my central questions about Bach's dialogue with modernity. This is the sense of voice and dialogue most commonly exemplified by the modern novel, but one that engages the unique properties of music to take the experience well beyond the purely verbal realm. As Charles Taylor says of the modern novel, the particularity of the voices generates a completely new sense of the general and typical, something that is distinct from the notion of the universal that pertained before the advent of early modern subjects.² Just as the novel is to be distinguished from drama proper, Bach's 'novelistic' Passions are distinguished from opera (although, unlike the novel, they are still to be performed and heard in time). If novels presuppose a long history of drama as part of their genealogy without being reducible to this genre, Bach's Passions relate to Baroque opera in absolutely essential ways, but are not thereby simply to be translated back into opera again without losing something of their 'novelistic' quality. This quality might have something to do with the way novels point beyond themselves through the necessary openness of their linguistic world, whereas dramatic production, in its very physicality, somehow constitutes the materiality of its fictional world, which is never fully effaced in the transformative power of performance.³

Yet one sort of materiality enduring in a performance of the Passions is the timbre of the voices who sing. These constitute the materiality of a

² Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self – The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 287.

³ Stanton B. Garner Jr, *The Absent Voice – Narrative Comprehension in the Theater* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p. xi.

fictional world, but also that of *our* world, in which we are experiencing something that is actually happening. As I will demonstrate, the principal voices are used in such a way – at least in Bach's original scoring – that our attention is drawn to them as entities with an enduring identity, overriding their specific representational roles. While I could not assert that Bach's own scoring is the only one that should be used for these works – after all, the vast majority of performances throughout their reception come nowhere near Bach's own practice – consideration of the original scoring tells us much about the Passions' reflection of a particular historical moment, providing insight that few other sources afford. This might also give us a window into the sort of listening practice that Bach and his performers may have presupposed. While such a practice – like the original scoring – can hardly be binding, it might through its unfamiliarity render us more sensitive to the ways this music can encourage us to intuit several different kinds of voice and narrative authority.

Vocal scoring

Given that Bach's Passions represent almost a single category in general perceptions of Western music (the numerous Passions of his major contemporaries – by Telemann and Keiser, for instance – continue to be largely ignored), there has been a tendency to assimilate them towards the more ubiquitous genres, specifically opera. So strongly have the dramatic elements of Bach's sacred music been interpreted in operatic terms that even so seminal a study as Joseph Kerman's *Opera as Drama* focuses on a Bach choral work as essential to Baroque drama while (unpardonably, many must now surely think) ignoring the operas of Handel.⁴ In fact, the trend for seeing church music as potentially operatic has its roots in Bach's own time, even if a theatrical staging of Jesus' Passion would have remained impossible within Lutheran practice. The reforms of cantata text construction proposed by Erdmann Neumeister in 1700 explicitly state that church music should capitalize on the musical and poetic forms of opera.⁵ But there is also the prohibition of operatic music in Bach's Leipzig contract, as if in recognition of the temptation to

⁴ Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* – new and revised edn (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 50–5.

⁵ Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach – His Work and Influence on the Music of Germany, 1685–1750*, 2 vols., trans. Clara Bell and J. A. Fuller-Maitland (London and New York: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1889, reprinted 1951), vol. 1, pp. 470–6.

write in this style; or the shrill complaint against Lutheran Passions for being too operatic, by a listener with Pietist inclinations.⁶

Nevertheless, staging one of Bach's Passions as if it were an opera would produce a very different effect from that of its original liturgical context. The chorus, however much its role might change between representing historical groups of people or providing meditative commentary, will be seen as a body of people on stage, representing a world divided from that of the spectator. Jesus will become a specific personage identified with a singer bodily present on stage. Moreover, the singers playing the small but crucial supporting roles will appear as actual characters, and those singing arias will be heard at least as bystanders (if not directly identified with specific characters: Mary Magdalene, Judas etc.), witnessing the action from within the world of the stage. In this way, the music will most likely be heard as consolidating and reinforcing the character of the personage inferred (although hearing music as a voice of its own is by no means to be excluded). This sort of performance generally belongs to the category of 'representation', serving to bring an existing story and its constituent events to life through the medium of music and drama.

What we know of Bach's own scoring of the Passions suggests something much stranger than most translations to staged production would tend to assume. Indeed, his scoring goes against the traditional operatic ends of representation because representation is only part of what these Passions might actually do. If dramatic representation of Jesus (i.e. acted, costumed) would have been unacceptable within the context of worship, what would have been entirely consonant with the Lutheran tradition was a sense of his 'real presence', something actual in the elements of the Eucharist and perhaps equally so within the physicality of musical sounds. It would be entirely erroneous then to suggest that the Passions are essentially unrealized operas – Bach and his colleagues were perfectly aware of what operas were – rather, they capitalize on existing operatic devices, and perhaps even operatic expectations on the part of the listeners,⁷ for very different ends. From

⁶ *NBR*, pp. 326–7; see also Emil Platen, 'Bachs Passionsmusiken als sakrales Theater – ein Seitenweg ihrer Rezeptionsgeschichte', in *Bericht über die Wissenschaftliche Konferenz anlässlich des 69. Bach-Festes der Neuen Bachgesellschaft, Leipzig, 29. und 30. März 1994 – Passionsmusiken im Umfeld Johann Sebastian Bachs/Bach unter den Diktaturen 1933–1945 und 1945–1989*, ed. Hans-Joachim Schulze, Ulrich Leisinger and Peter Wollny (Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Olms, 1995), pp. 87–102, esp. p. 87.

⁷ As Tanya Kevorkian notes, after the closure of the Leipzig opera house in 1720, some congregants in Leipzig might well have seen church music, if not church services in general, as a substitute for opera; *Baroque Piety: Religion, Society, and Music in Leipzig, 1650–1750* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 39–40.

the point of view of their historical position, opera belongs to the past (the creative context) of these Passions rather than their future.

Although there has been considerable dispute about Bach's vocal scoring in recent decades, most who have examined Bach's original parts for cantatas, Passions and other oratorios will agree with Joshua Rifkin that the 'soloist' in each vocal range sang all the music notated in his part, whether chorus, chorale, recitative or aria. The Concertist (i.e. solo) parts in Bach's Passions contain the principal vocal material within their range (divided into two choirs in the case of the Matthew Passion). Moreover, the parts used by the Evangelist and Jesus in both Passions are generally titled 'Evangelista' and 'Jesus' respectively.⁸ It is technically feasible that other singers could have looked on and that Bach may have told them when to sing and when to be silent but, given the performance detail of Bach's parts in general (e.g. indications of ornaments, dynamic and articulation), it seems surprising that the simple and far more basic indications of *solo* and *tutti* are generally absent. More likely, Bach would have given separate parts to the extra singers doubling chorus lines, as is indeed the case for the John Passion, one of a handful of pieces to survive with ripieno parts (i.e. extra parts that double the vocal lines in choruses). An obvious direction in which to argue from here is that such doubling was Bach's standard practice and that countless ripieno parts have simply disappeared.⁹

It is impossible to disprove this possibility, but those who 'hope' for the discovery of these lost parts generally do so under the commonsense assumption that Bach, like most of us today, would have wanted to use any spare singers who happened to be around to bolster the choir for the chorales and choruses. Yet here the evidence of the parts suggests something very different: character parts (e.g. the parts of Judas, Peter, Pilate) in the Passions generally contain only their own particular roles, and surrounding choruses and even chorales are usually marked 'tacet'.¹⁰ If even

⁸ For more details, see Joshua Rifkin, 'Bach's Chorus: a Preliminary Report', *Musical Times* 123 (1982), 747–54, esp. 748–9; the entire principle of Bach's scoring is exhaustively explored in Andrew Parrott, *The Essential Bach Choir* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000). For details on the scoring in Bach's Passions, see Daniel R. Melamed, *Hearing Bach's Passions* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 49–65, 136–9. Much of my discussion here is a reworking of my article 'Bach's Vocal Scoring: What Can It Mean?', *Early Music* 26 (1998), 99–107.

⁹ Even here, Joshua Rifkin argues convincingly that the pattern of survival makes this seem unlikely; see his 'Bassoons, Violins and Voices: a Response to Ton Koopman', *Early Music* 25 (1997), 302–7, esp. 305.

¹⁰ See Rifkin, 'Bach's Chorus', 749; Andrew Parrott, 'Bach's Chorus: a "Brief yet Highly Necessary" Reappraisal', *Early Music* 24 (1996), 551–80, esp. 574.

'extra' singers did not sing in chorales, congregational participation in the chorales within the Passion setting would seem highly unlikely, however much the congregation might be encouraged to empathize with the communal spirit of the chorales.¹¹ The 'tacet' signs for chorales are evident, for instance, in the Matthew Passion part containing the music for Peter, Caiphas, Pontifex 2 and Pilate (all presumably to be taken by the one singer),¹² and in the separate parts for the servant and Pilate in the John Passion. Arthur Mendel, editor of the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* volume of the John Passion, notes that these tacet markings are 'eigentümlich' without commenting further.¹³

The common assumption that Bach probably wished to combine the resources of his first and second choirs for both Passions is doubtless correct. As Daniel Melamed has observed, in the John Passion the second choir acts as ripienists for the first, while in the Matthew Passion these singers, while still largely secondary (and often doubling the first choir in the four-part writing), sometimes become a choir in their own right.¹⁴

¹¹ The libretti that the congregation would have had for the Passion setting contained only the poetic sections (i.e. Picander's writing), none of the biblical text or chorales. However, each aria is introduced by a reference to the event that has just happened in the Gospel narrative (thus the first 'scene' of the Matthew Passion concludes with the first arioso and aria, with the rubric 'after the woman had anointed Jesus'). The congregation would, however, have sung in the chorales that surround the Passion setting (these are not usually included in performances today); for the shape of the liturgy and the chorales concerned, see Melamed, *Hearing Bach's Passions*, p. 135, table 1–1. Kevorkian presents evidence that congregational participation in chorales in passions and cantatas was indeed possible, at least in some parts of Lutheran Germany; *Baroque Piety*, pp. 43–6.

¹² See Alfred Dürr, critical commentary to the *NBA* of the Matthew Passion, vol. II/5, p. 49.

¹³ *NBA*, vol. II/4, critical commentary, p. 51. Examination of the autograph score of the Matthew Passion (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin/Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Mus. Ms. J. S. Bach P 25, facsimile edition, ed. Karl-Heinz Köhler, Leipzig: VEB, 1974), reveals an interesting direction from Bach that may be the closest we have to verbal evidence of the one-to-a-part scoring. The duet with chorus 'So ist mein Jesus nun gefangen' runs into the double chorus 'Sind Blitze, sind Donner' (27a–b) and the latter begins on the last system (seven staves) of a verso page, which also contains the last two bars of 'So ist mein Jesus'. Given that these seven staves will not accommodate the two continuo lines and the two bass and tenor lines that open the chorus (the ensuing page gives the standard double-choir format), the first two vocal entries and the continuo line are written on single staves. The opening bass entry is marked 'Basso 1 Chori/ Basso 2 Chori concord'; the next, tenor, entry has the marking 'due Tenori', while the continuo line is marked 'tutti li Bassi in unisono'. These markings seem entirely consistent with a chorus that had one singer to a part and a continuo section with (at least) a violoncello, violone and organ on each line; if 'tutti' is appropriate for indicating the amalgamation of two continuo lines (making a total of about six players) this would surely have been used to denote a choral line that likewise had about six singers to a part.

¹⁴ Daniel R. Melamed, 'The Double Chorus in J. S. Bach's *St Matthew Passion* BWV 244', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57 (2004), 3–50; *Hearing Bach's Passions*, pp. 49–65.

Therefore, the two Passions do essentially have the same vocal forces – namely, eight singers, four of whom are particularly privileged – but the singers for the Matthew Passion can split into two choruses. Certainly the doubled scoring facilitates the performance of ‘Mein teurer Heiland’ in the John Passion (32) in which the solo bass sings from the concertist bass part while the ripieno bass, singing from the ripieno part, provides the bass line to the chorale which is sung simultaneously. Significantly, these cases suggest that it was not absolutely crucial to Bach whether or not the choral lines were sung one to a part or with a doubling singer. The lesson for us is, rather, that these choral lines were essentially soloistically conceived, however many singers might actually have realized them (difficult as this may seem in the context of today’s psychology of performance).

The entire debate about vocal scoring brings up an issue that takes us outside the usual discussions about the technicalities of performance. This arises in the case of the bass part for ‘Mein teurer Heiland’ in the John Passion (32). To many it might seem patently absurd that the bass who has just ‘died’ as the figure of Jesus (at the end of the preceding recitative) should now, reading off the same part, sing the bass line of the aria. Perhaps there were two concertists reading off the part, one singing Jesus and the other the remaining solos. Yet if Bach went to the trouble to prepare four ripieno parts to be used separately from the concertist parts, and the parts of the servant and Pilate appear in dedicated parts (containing no other music), it would seem strange that he did not prepare two, differentiated, concertist bass parts (furthermore, it should be remembered, Bach’s concertist bass parts for both Passions are marked ‘Jesus’). In short, the idea that the bass who sang the part of Jesus sang nothing else, like an operatic character, is not substantiated by the sources.

The actual part of Peter in both Passions is extremely simple (presumably taken by an inexperienced singer?), while his weeping is elaborately depicted by the Evangelist and his personal sorrow is rendered both intimate and universal in the ensuing arias (‘Ach, mein Sinn’, found in the Evangelist part of the John Passion, 13, ‘Erbarme dich’ in the first alto part of the Matthew Passion, 39). If these Passions were true operas, one would expect the sorrow and reflection to be confined to the one character, Peter. Handel’s ‘Brockes Passion’, for instance, as a non-liturgical Passion-oratorio, follows operatic conventions by developing some of the minor roles into substantial characters. Peter himself sings two remorseful arias after the cockcrow (‘Heul, du Fluch!’ and ‘Schau, ich fall’ in *strenger Buße*), introducing and separating them with his own reflective recitatives. Bach seems to go against the tendency even within the

Gospels themselves to render Peter surprisingly rounded as a character (at least in relation to most ancient literature, which generally presents personages more as types than as specific individuals).¹⁵ Indeed, all the named characters apart from Jesus (and the Evangelist) seem to be as anonymous and vocally 'other' as possible.¹⁶ It is as if Bach decided to take any sense of individuality out of the biblical characters – apportioning these to singers who do nothing else – and concentrated instead on the principal singers who are profiled as actual people living in the present (including the Evangelist and Jesus). The guilt of Peter is transferred from one singer to another, perhaps as a way of demonstrating the very Lutheran concept that we are all capable of becoming virtually any character in the Passion story, and that human works often end in failure, even with the very best of intentions.

In the Matthew Passion all the incidental female roles (wife of Pilate and *both* servant girls) are integrated into a single part. Bach seems to have distinguished between the registers of the two servant girls, so as to make the single singer impersonate two different voices (see recitative, 38a). The role of Pilate's wife is interesting from another point of view (recitative 45a): in Matthew's text Pilate's wife's words are the reported speech of a message sent to Pilate in his judgement seat, so his wife does not appear in person. Yet here she is treated as if she were one of the speaking characters who is actually present, an oddity which is evident in many traditional Matthew Passion settings too. The effect here is to destabilize the realistic portrayal of the Passion story: two servant girls are merged into one voice (divided into two registers) while Pilate's wife is accorded more presence than she actually had. The two 'extra' bass parts are split unevenly: one contains the roles of Peter, Caiphas, second priest and Pilate, so these roles are essentially merged into a single timbre (however much the singer might try to differentiate them) and the other contains the role of Judas and first priest. Judas seems to be sung by the male voice heard least in the entire performance. His brief role as first priest (singing together with the

¹⁵ Fred W. Burnett, 'Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels', in *Semeia* 63, *Characterization in Biblical Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Adele Berlin (Atlanta, 1993), 3–28, esp. 20–3.

¹⁶ See David R. Beck, 'The Narrative Function of Anonymity in Fourth Gospel Characterization', in *Semeia* 63, *Characterization in Biblical Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Adele Berlin (Atlanta, 1993), 143–58, esp. 154. John's Gospel, more than the other, seems to capitalize on the indeterminacy of many of the characters, where, for instance, Jesus' mother is unnamed, and the 'beloved disciple' suddenly appears late in the narrative (Chapter 13). This greater indeterminacy may well have been designed to encourage readers' deeper participation, leaving them to fill in the gaps in identity and, as it were, become disciples in their own right.

second) is to assert that it is not appropriate to put Judas's blood money in the temple coffers (41c). This happens just after this same singer's final utterance as Judas (41a), as if to show that Judas's influence lives on after his death (parallel to the way the singer performing the part of Jesus continues to sing after Jesus dies).

Perhaps the singers act out doctrinal issues in a way rather more subtle – but also more real – than that implied by any assumed hermeneutic musical language or code. This practical embodiment of doctrinal issues could reflect engrained attitudes towards interpreting the Passion story rather than conscious intentions on Bach's part. Luther stated at the outset of his Passion sermons of 1519 and 1521 (still widely read in Bach's time) that it is wrong to blame others – such as Judas and the Jews, collectively – for the death of Jesus, since, as sinners always already fallen, we are all to blame.¹⁷ This attitude might give us a clue as to why Bach gave the parts of Peter in both Passions (and Judas in the Matthew Passion) to singers who participate in none of the choruses, chorales or arias. Their parts become featureless – virtually anonymous – while the sorrow of their betrayals is vividly portrayed in the Evangelist's depiction of weeping and in the arias sung by the concertists, those singers with whose voices we most closely identify. In other words, our assimilation of the grief of failure in the present is far more important than the historical character of the disciple concerned. His failure is a matter for the general human condition and therefore this sordid story is actually about us.

In the Matthew Passion our own responsibility for the suffering of Jesus is heavily emphasized in the ariosos and arias of the first half (and reinforced in the second with 'Erbarme dich') and our imitation of Jesus in accepting our own suffering becomes an important topic in the second half. This, together with an intermediate emphasis on Christ's loving redemption, follows more or less the structure of Luther's own meditation on the Passion, as Eric Chafe has suggested.¹⁸ Luther, feeling keenly his own persecution, stressed that Christ's Passion should not be acted out in words or appearances, but in one's own life.¹⁹ Having acknowledged guilt and received Jesus' loving redemption, all should foster their potential to imitate Jesus and be fearless in the face of persecution. If Bach were to have

¹⁷ Martin Luther, 1519 Passion sermon, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: kritische Gesamtausgabe [Weimarer Ausgabe]* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1983), vol. 2, pp. 136–42; 1521 Passion sermon, vol. 9, pp. 649–56, esp. 651.

¹⁸ Chafe, *Tonal Allegory*, pp. 135–7, 337–47.

¹⁹ 'Dem Christus leyden muß nit mit worten und scheyn, sondern mit dem leben und warhafftig gehandelt werden', M. Luther, 'A Meditation on Christ's Passion', 1519, pp. 141–2.

taken this injunction against representing Christ's Passion seriously, perhaps his aim was indeed to make the experience of these works actually part of 'one's own life', beyond the sort of representation that re-enactment would normally imply. By trying to fulfil this traditional injunction with the most advanced 'musical technology' he could muster, Bach was perhaps also doing something that was unlikely to have been part of his conscious intention: creating the possibility for a new type of musical listener, drawn into the experience in ways entirely different from even the most spectacular forms of operatic representation. Perhaps this is something to do with the way operatic devices are combined with the religious purpose of making the listener an active participant in the event – indeed, the very target of the entire performance (rather than the 'consumer' of an advanced form of entertainment).

The most striking way in which Bach used anti-theatrical means to make the experience – paradoxically – more real for the listener concerns the playing of multiple roles by the singers who sang the roles of the Evangelist and Jesus. The singer of Jesus in both Passions also has to be part of the crowd, regardless of its mood (these roles being in the New Testament time zone). Furthermore, he sings in the Lutheran time zone of the chorale, and, finally, in the Leipzig present of the arias. His participation in the choruses (as the concertist bass in the John Passion and as the sole bass in choir 1 in the Matthew Passion) is striking, as he has constantly to switch between the role of Jesus and that of a crowd that frequently calls for 'his' own death. This helps to reinforce the typically Lutheran point that we are all to be held responsible for Jesus' death, however Christ-like any of us may seem. It also helps to allay any fears that Jesus is being impersonated by a human actor.

Interestingly, the two bass arias in the John Passion, and those for bass 1 (i.e. in the part labelled 'Jesus') in the Matthew Passion come towards the end of the work, when Jesus is largely silent or already dead.²⁰ We now hear a singer who is sonically associated with Jesus as a human being trying to follow and imitate him, a remarkably potent and poignant move. The aria 'Eilt, ihr angefochtenen Seelen' (24) from the John Passion sets a text derived from Brockes's Passion libretto. Here the singer exhorts the

²⁰ There is a bass arioso at an earlier point in the John Passion (in all but the 1725 version), 'Betrachte, meine Seel' (19), which comes near the beginning of Part 2. However, contrary to the pattern Bach later established in the Matthew Passion, the ensuing aria is sung not by the bass but by the tenor. 'Ach, nun ist mein Jesus hin' (30) was set for bass in Bach's earliest versions of the Matthew Passion, but Bach evidently decided to reserve the bass's solo role (in the Leipzig present) until the point by which Jesus' words are largely finished (see p. 206 below).

other three vocal parts to follow him to Golgatha ('Hurry, you beleaguered souls . . . Where? . . . To Golgatha!'). There is a sense that the bass, as the principal voice bringing Jesus to presence within the performance, is already at Golgatha and consequently knows most about the salvation that can be achieved by following Jesus. Brockes wrote the original text for the allegorical 'daughter of Zion', thus suggesting the use of a high, female-sounding voice (as Handel uses in his setting). Given the popularity of Brockes's text, Bach undoubtedly knew it in its original form (indeed he probably made the selections from it himself and also copied Handel's setting) and must have had conscious reasons for reassigning it to bass.

The bass aria with chorale 'Mein teurer Heiland' (32) comes at precisely the moment after Jesus dies, but the notion that it is sung by the same singer who performed the part of Jesus is not necessarily so absurd as it might initially seem. First, one of the central points of John's Gospel is the view of Christ as divine from the start and that his resurrection and victory are all preordained, the mechanical means by which we achieve salvation. In this aria, the singer who has just played the part of Jesus now speaks as a human who asks if the process of salvation has indeed been achieved through Jesus' death. With the line 'Es is vollbracht, bin ich vom Sterben freigemacht?' ('It is fulfilled, am I freed from death?'), the sense of the singer's salvation is particularly strong; having just 'died' he now has the means towards eternal life, he is 'freed from death' both as a human being and as Jesus himself. Moreover, the accompanying chorale begins with the lines 'Jesu, der du warest tot, lebest nun ohn Ende' ('Jesu, you who were dead now live without end'), addressed by the entire chorus of singers to the very singer who sang Jesus' words. At the moment of his death, his resurrection and immortality are thus assured. In performance, this creates for the listeners a present that is considerably fuller and richer than we might have expected, something very different from the sort of recognition we often gain at the end of dramas, from our customary position of ironic superiority. This sense of resurrection within the presence of the same bass voice is almost as surprising as Shakespeare's resurrection of the supposedly dead Hermione from her statue at the end of *The Winter's Tale*, a highly productive subversion of the customary expectations of drama (a technique used to more sinister effect by Mozart and da Ponte at the end of *Don Giovanni*).²¹

²¹ Garner, *The Absent Voice*, pp. 96–7.

In the Matthew Passion we see Jesus as a more vulnerable human being; his eternal divinity is not so obvious as in John's Gospel (in the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, Christ's divinity is revealed more according to a temporal 'timetable' with its climax at the Resurrection). Picander, Bach's librettist, places a great emphasis on Jesus' supreme love and the human aspect of his suffering. This may reflect the influence of the early-Enlightenment move away from Jesus as the instrument who satisfies the wrath of an angry God towards a focus on the relation between a loving Jesus and the human being, the conception of Jesus as an ideal model for humanity.²² Imitation of Jesus is the central theme of the first bass 1 aria from the Matthew Passion: 'Komm, süßes Kreuz' (57, 'Come, sweet cross, I wish to say, my Jesus, just put it on me! Should my pain become too heavy, then help me to carry it yourself'). This comes after the bass arioso 'Ja freilich will in uns' (56, 'Yes, gladly is the flesh and blood in us compelled to the cross; The more it benefits our souls, the more painfully it weighs'). This pair of solos comes at the point at which Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus bear the cross. Simon is, literally, the first human to carry Jesus' burden, and Simon – more than anyone – teaches us by example that if we imitate Jesus he will reciprocally help us in our own travail. The bass concertist makes his first appearance as an aria soloist in the Leipzig present at precisely the point at which a human being begins to imitate Jesus. The fact that he has been imitating Jesus for the entire Passion up to this juncture renders the point extremely strongly: the imitator of Jesus in Leipzig takes strength from the first imitator of Jesus in Jerusalem, and is therefore heard by the congregation as a sort of Simon of Cyrene character.

This issue might well have lain behind Bach's decision to replace the bass soloist for the opening aria of Part 2, 'Ach, nun ist mein Jesus hin' (30) in the earliest version of the work with the alto. This aria, the chorus of which adapts love poetry from the Song of Songs, represents the Daughter of Zion as symbolic of the church, lamenting her captured lover. Bach's original allocation of the aria would have taken the swapping of roles to new extremes (the bass 1 taking on an archetypically female role) and would have weakened the bass's later association with the imitation and assimilation of Jesus.

The second bass 1 arioso-aria is the last such pair in the piece ('Am Abend, da es kühle war'/'Mache dich, mein Herze, rein', 64–65) and may

²² See Elke Axmacher, 'Aus Liebe will mein Heyland sterben' – Untersuchungen zum Wandel des Passionsverständnisses im frühen 18. Jahrhundert (Stuttgart: Carus, 1984), esp. pp. 204–18.

therefore make a particularly lasting impression on the listener. The arioso makes reference to the fact that Jesus has endured the cross, his body now at rest; the last lines run 'Bid them give me the dead Jesus, O healing, O precious keepsake' ('lasse dir den toten Jesum schenken, o heilsames, o köstlichs Angedenken!'). The aria goes on to plead more for this 'keep-sake', with the words 'I will myself entomb Jesus. For He shall henceforth in me take His sweet rest for ever and ever' ('ich will Jesum selbst begraben. Denn er soll nunmehr in mir für und für seine süße Ruhe haben'). The rhetorical force of someone singing about henceforth containing Jesus, when he has just indeed been acting through the last moments of his saviour's life, is undoubtedly very strong. Our overworked singer provides us with a model of faith that further encourages us to take on Jesus as a model of human perfection. A sense of doubled reality in the present is also suggested by the way the strings (which previously accompanied the words of Jesus like a halo) are now joined by the oboes (which have already accompanied all the other choir 1 soloists, with the exception of the bass).

How do these various factors influence the listener's experience of Bach's Passions? In the original performances a large proportion of the congregation, such as the poorer people standing at the back and the women in the pews in the main body of the church facing forward, would have been looking towards the pulpit and away from the main body of performers (the Matthew Passion may have used the organ in the 'swallows' nest' gallery for performances in the Thomaskirche, and perhaps the ripienist(s) who sang in the first and last chorus of Part 1 were also placed there; but this organ was dismantled in 1740).²³ The men who could afford to rent pews would have been in the side galleries and therefore more able to see the details of performance.²⁴ But, in general, the effect of the performance would have been disembodied,²⁵ and even awareness of the physical presence of the performers, with their multiple roles, would not have created the effect of a dramatic spectacle. If Roland Barthes is correct to state that the Lutheran Reformation inaugurated a particularly

²³ Peter Williams, *J. S. Bach – A Life in Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 279.

²⁴ Tanya Kevorkian, 'The Reception of the Cantata during Leipzig Church Services, 1700–1750', in Carol K. Baron (ed.), *Bach's Changing World – Voices in the Community* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), pp. 174–89, esp. p. 175; *Baroque Piety*, pp. 29–52.

²⁵ Bach would have been used to working with an even greater sense of disembodiment at the court chapel at Weimar, where the music gallery was situated above the ceiling, in which a wide aperture was cut; Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach – The Learned Musician* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2000), pp. 122–3.

intense culture of listening,²⁶ these Passion performances must have taken this notion a stage further through their effacement of visual display. Perhaps what would have been most consistent for the contemporary congregation would have been the timbres of the main singers, heard in various contexts and characters, and sounding in dialogue with the other vocal and instrumental forces.

The implied listener of late Baroque opera is likely to have been a fairly stable figure sitting outside the action, excited, moved and calmed by what goes on, but at a consistent distance in space and time. Such operas are usually written with a fixed point of view in mind, somewhat akin to the perspective in painting, a point from which the constant alternations between external-objective and internal-subjective time (i.e. recitative and aria) are effortlessly assimilated. In Bach's Passions, on the other hand, the constant changes of time zone and the fluidity of characterization would render the works baffling from an operatic standpoint. While a traditional operatic aria might address the listener in the abstract (e.g. about the value of hope or the destructiveness of jealousy), much of the poetic material in the Passions – partly derived from the sermon tradition – speaks with the individual listener directly in mind, so as to give him or her the best chance of cultivating faith as the only means to salvation. This listener is enjoined to witness a story that is entirely familiar as something immediate and newly relevant; both text and music seem to aim to shock the listener, to stimulate remorse and encourage personal change. By turning the focus more on the voices of the actual singers in the present than on the realistic depiction of personages from the past, the performance might draw the listener in as someone who could equally well take on the various roles. In other words, Bach seems to have designed his scoring anti-theatrically, specifically to break down the traditional barrier between stage and audience.

Bach may have derived some of this from the dialogic nature of much of the Gospel texts: with these we surely experience much more from the voices responding to one another than from any detailed description of

²⁶ 'To *listen* is the evangelical verb par excellence: listening to the divine word is what faith amounts to, for it is by such listening that man is linked to God: Luther's Reformation was largely made in the name of listening: the Protestant church is exclusively a site of listening', from 'Listening', in Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms – Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985/1991), pp. 245–60, quotation from p. 250. On the function of Passion music in making the Logos immanent to the listener, see Hans Blumenberg, *Matthäuspassion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), pp. 235–6.

any individual character. It is almost as if Bach had adopted this feature, something that is essentially novelistic and indeed comparatively rare in ancient literature,²⁷ and reworked it on the level of performance. Across the pre-existing biblical dialogue there runs another dialogue between texts of differing authorship and age, and also one between the timbres of the principal singers as actual presences. This dialogic intensity seems to anticipate, if not in some sense necessitate, the response of the listener.

Narrative and imitation

With these various implications of vocal scoring and listening position in mind, how do these take us further in exploring the question of voice? The first issue to consider is how they affect the presentation and representation of the Gospel writer's voice. By being split up into several voices, his narrative gains immensely in terms of contrast, but at the same time his own voice is rendered more diffuse. The individual singers (the Evangelist and Jesus especially) begin to gain authority over his text by the way their own voices develop independently in the course of the performance. Moreover, his text is fused with several forms of commentary by later authors, as we hear exactly the same voices moving from his original narrative to the chorale and aria texts.

If the vocal scoring works towards refracting the Gospel text, the flow of the music, particularly in narrative areas, seems to provide a degree of unity and continuity between the narration in the past tense and the presentation of the various personages in the present. The style of recitative does not change when, for instance, Judas or Peter enters in the first person, nor particularly when the Evangelist quotes first-person passages from the Old Testament. In the John Passion in particular, even Jesus' lines are not essentially different from the third-person material of the Evangelist (see p. 70). Presence in the crowd scenes is also underlined by the joining of all voices together into a much larger texture that frequently mimics the noise and texture of the crowd. On the whole, though, the music serves the dual purpose of supporting a narrative in the past tense (diegetic mode, which presupposes an authoritative narrator) and

²⁷ David McCracken, 'Character in the Boundary: Bakhtin's Interdividuality in Biblical Narratives', in *Semeia* 63, *Characterization in Biblical Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Adele Berlin (Atlanta, 1993), 29–42, esp. 35.

capturing the immediate presence of a specific personage in the present (mimetic mode).²⁸ Moreover, it seems to provide a seamless transition between these two modes.

The aria texts, which normally represent first-person utterances from the position of a subject in the present, can also involve addressing the listener (or the object of adoration) in the second person. The music for the arias makes no obvious distinction between the presentation of a personal utterance, which we happen to overhear (e.g. 'Buß und Reu', 6, in the Matthew Passion), and an utterance that specifically calls for a response or for action (as in 'Eilt, ihr angefochtenen Seelen', 24, in the John Passion). In the case of 'Erwäge, wie sein blutgefärbter Rücken', 20, in the John Passion, the speaker seems to take almost the role of preacher in relation to the listener, exhorting the congregation towards the 'correct' thought, association or emotion (see p. 81). 'Sehet, Jesus hat die Hand, uns zu fassen, ausgespannt', 60, in the Matthew Passion performs a similar function of stirring the listener, but almost from the point of view of an ecstatic vision that the singer implores us (together with the second choir, with its interjections of 'wohin?' and 'wo?') to share. Such characters show nothing of the omniscience of the Gospel narrator, their knowledge being rather similar to our own, which makes the urgency of their doctrinal exclamations that much more realistic.

In all, the music seems capable of uniting the roles of narration and action, taking us across centuries in an instant, and making different personages and modes of speech live within the living, breathing singer of our present.²⁹ To the degree that the Gospel narration is 're-authored' through various forms of musical and verbal interpretation, Bach's settings may well mirror something of the likely historical composition of the Gospels themselves. These were, most likely, the result of multiple authorship, based on a variety of witnesses and inherited stories, and drawn together into the traditions associated with each of the four named writers. Just as these authors share a considerable amount of their material (particularly in the case of the three 'synoptic' Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke), Bach shares some of the music across the two Passions (e.g. chorale melodies, some of the recitative material, the 'Jesus von Nazareth'

²⁸ For a close study of these modes, see Karol Berger, *A Theory of Art* (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 165–88.

²⁹ See Blumenberg, *Matthäuspasion*, pp. 21–7, for a stimulating discussion of multiple authorship and the tradition for understanding the Bible as representing a single truth and a single history.

music which is adapted in the Matthew Passion as the chorus ‘Gegrüßet seist du, Jüdenkönig’ 53b), yet manages to create a very different ethos for each. In all, then, Bach seems to provide a musical analogy to the notion of multiple authorship and the common features of the Gospel narratives while at the same time implying the cohesion and individual style of each. There is a sense in which the music renders homogenous the various levels of the text, even those that might not hold together on their own; it creates a particular sense of identity.³⁰

Something of this cohesion and individuality lies in the fact that the biblical text is fundamentally in the third-person, narrative, mode. Bach assigned the third-person material to the principal tenor (labelled ‘Evangelista’), whom he presumably identified with the writer himself (his title page for the Matthew Passion designates the work as ‘according to the Evangelist Matthew’).³¹ The tenor acquires a sense of narrative authority, as the principal means by which the story and its events come to presence. This is something peculiar to the genre of the oratorio Passion (i.e. the elaborate setting of a Gospel text within liturgical practice) and stands apart from the majority of dramatic music in the Baroque era, which generally presents speech in the first person without the intermediary of a narrator; everything happens in the present tense. Most of Handel’s oratorios – based as they often are on biblical events – avoid third-person narrative unless a pre-existent text specifically prescribes it (e.g. *Messiah* and *Israel in Egypt*, both also based on direct biblical quotation). They come as close to opera as they can, capitalizing on Handel’s consummate dramatic skills. If there is third-person speech (beyond that demanded by biblical passages) it is usually found in choruses which can provide a form of commentary (rather than narrative), maintaining something of the traditional role of the chorus dating back to classical drama. The same sorts of trends are evident in the fashionable Passion oratorio of the early eighteenth century, for which the Gospels are the narrative source and in which the specific characters are developed in operatic fashion. In the Brookes text, the role of the Evangelist is stripped down to whatever cannot be presented in the first-person speech of the characters; much of his text is transformed into rhyming couplets, which tends to efface the customarily authoritative impact of biblical narration.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–8.

³¹ ‘secundum Evangelistam Matthaeus’; see Mus. Ms. J. S. Bach P 25, title page. The title page for the John Passion is similar, if more intimate, ‘Passio secundum Joannem’, see Mus. Ms. J. S. Bach P 28, opening page.

The third-person narrative is something that relates to what I have described as the novelistic ethos of Bach's settings. For, within the context of a novel, however multiple the voices that may be heard, any narrator speaking from outside the events represented maintains a degree of authority that is very different from that of the speaking characters. By narrating in the past tense, the Evangelist also gives the impression of belonging to the reader's present,³² linking the reader more directly to the actual events and characters of the past. If we decide to enter the world of a novel and experience what it seems to offer, we have to assume that everything a narrator says is necessarily true. Of course it is possible to write a novel without a narrator (such as the epistolary novel), but as soon as one appears, this figure will traditionally have absolute authority. Otherwise, the world within the narrative would not coherently exist, or – as in those novels that purposely render the narrator unreliable or inconsistent – would become fragmentary and no longer to be trusted.³³ If John states that 'Jesus wußte alles . . .' we have to believe that Jesus did indeed know everything, since John's Jesus came to presence only through his narrative and would not otherwise be known (so, from a strictly literary perspective, the Jesus of each of the four Gospels is a discrete figure entirely dependent on the narrator's report). Conversely, when an actual personage speaks, we know that these words can be unreliable (as in the specific case of Peter, who at a crucial point claims not to know Jesus). From this point of view, even Jesus, as his words are quoted, might not be speaking the truth (although we are hardly likely to doubt a crucified man's claim to be thirsty, for instance). Within the context of the world created through the narrative, then, the Evangelist's statements about someone's inner thoughts are necessarily correct, while first-person utterances may be unreliable.

³² As Berger points out (*Bach's Cycle*, p. 107), the 'time of the story is always structurally embedded within, and dependent upon, the time of the storytelling: the latter forms the framework within which the former may appear'. He makes a further distinction between the time of the storytelling and the time of the contemplation by the individual or the collective faithful. Although there is a conceptual distinction here, I am not convinced there is one in terms of time zones: the continuity of the music (and indeed the continuity of voices who sing both the narrative and the contemplative components) surely brings the narrative and the contemplation together, suggesting that aspects of the Passion story are made present in each performance of the work.

³³ See John A. Darr, 'Narrator as Character: Mapping a Reader-oriented Approach to Narration in Luke-Acts', in *Semeia* 63, *Characterization in Biblical Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Adele Berlin (Atlanta, 1993), 43–60, esp. 53–4, for the observation that Gospel narratives were written and read (before 'an empirical and ironic age') under the assumption of a reliable narrator.

Thinking of the Evangelist's statements as those of a narrator who effectively creates the world he describes helps us to negotiate the sorts of problems that Hans Blumenberg outlines when he asks how it is possible for there to be a narration about what happened in the Garden of Gethsemene, when it is also stated that the disciples were asleep, and it would have been impossible for anyone to have recorded Jesus' sorrow and doubts.³⁴ Following Blumenberg's train of thought, the music somehow covers up an untruth. But logical consistency of witness has seldom been a problem for those inclined to believe either the literal truth of Scripture or that such texts are human accounts pointing towards a transcendent truth. Indeed, the tendency to assume that texts in general must hang together and are witness to some hidden plan is common to reading practices well beyond those for scriptural texts.³⁵ By the same token, any narrative text whatever must contain gaps and inconsistencies if the reader is disposed to look for them. But what is significant here is that Matthew and John display precisely the same sorts of narrative authority that render all accounts in literature, secular or sacred, as convincing as they can be. Each Gospel writer appropriates something of the omniscience of God himself, knowing everything there is to know about each situation, character and mind, and speaking from a present that represents the past as certain and complete. On the other hand, the narrator is not profligate in providing objective and necessarily true knowledge about each person and situation, but allows the dialogic aspects of the text to disclose information and nuance.³⁶

The first-person, dialogic, utterances provided by the Gospel writer therefore serve to give his account more reality and a sense of emerging knowledge, while interacting with his authoritative third-person narrative. The 'reality' of the one mode reinforces the 'truth' of the other. Were the Gospels to have survived solely in multiple first-person voices, like a play, they would undoubtedly be more vivid and realistic but perhaps less effective in reinforcing the believer's sense of biblical truth. Even God's actions seem more authoritative in the context of third-person utterance ('Then God said' surely creates a greater sense of awe than a list of first-person creative reminiscences severed from a third-person context, e.g. 'Then I created man'). Bach's settings retain the third-person passages

³⁴ Blumenberg, *Matthäuspassion*, pp. 48–50.

³⁵ Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy – On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 71–2.

³⁶ See McCracken, 'Character in the Boundary', 36–7.

while both diversifying the first-person passages and adding a considerable amount of commentary. The question that now arises is whether the music provides something equivalent to the sense of presence implied by first-person speech and the sense of authority (and veracity) conveyed by the third-person passages, something working in parallel to, but not necessarily reducible to, the persons of the text.

In the Matthew Passion, Bach's music has a function analogous to the effect of 'first-person' presence in the way it gives reality to Jesus' utterances (e.g. the string 'halo') or to the physical sense of the crowd. I have already alluded to the way music can make the sense of certain words actual (such as 'Aufruhr', in MP, 4b; see p. 162). Naomi Cumming suggests that the Evangelist's report of Peter's weeping in the Matthew Passion brings Peter's weeping from the past to the present tense, Bach's melismas turning the statement into 'direct speech'.³⁷ A different sort of reality is perhaps evoked by the way music renders the first-person texts of the arias present, through its immediacy and sensuality, and embodied in the intertwining of lines and the strategic placing of dissonance.

Music may also function as a form of translation. Bach may well have believed music to be a reliable medium of translation, most specifically for the final words of Jesus in the Matthew Passion, where the Hebrew text is sung by the bass taking the role of Jesus, closely followed by the translation into German by the Evangelist. As Martin Geck has observed, this translation is effected by a direct transposition up a fourth, using the same intervals and even accidentals in the same place in the notation.³⁸ To Bach, it seems that the translation from Hebrew to German is analogous to the direct transposition of a melody and chords. We may even gain the impression of music as representing an 'original language', transcending all human manifestations, since it remains essentially the same when the verbal language changes. The Evangelist's quotation of the bass's words in the present of his own narration might also suggest that the move from the time zone of the historical Jesus to our own is analogous to musical transposition.

There are instances where the music does something specific as a 'voice' – in terms of the sense of authority and character it projects – and which works independently of the text or its meaning. The close imitation between flutes and voice in 'Ich folge dir gleichfalls' ('I follow you likewise') of the John Passion (9) would instantiate the notion of following

³⁷ Naomi Cumming, 'The Subjectivities of "Erbarne Dich"', *Music Analysis* 16/1 (1997), 5–44, 21.

³⁸ Martin Geck, *Bach – Leben und Werk* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2001), pp. 444–5.

even if it were not tied to a text in which the modern believer, like Simon Peter, vows to follow Jesus. Music's independent voice is most realistic when it relates to concepts that are not exclusively verbal (the music's sense of 'following' is tangible as a gesture and does not have to be translated into words). The gestural implications of music are also evident in 'Komm, süßes Kreuz' ('Come, sweet cross') in the Matthew Passion (57) with its obbligato for viola da gamba, perhaps the most demanding part that Bach wrote for this instrument. He originally wrote this for a lute, but there was clearly much to be gained from the greater projection of the viola da gamba. Its sound is relatively unfamiliar within the context of the performance³⁹ and creates a new sensation to jolt the listener into conceiving of the actual weight and substance of the cross. Moreover, the difficulty of performing the obbligato must surely relate to the difficulty of carrying the cross and of the imitation of Jesus in the more general sense. Difficulty is heard in this music as something embodied in performance and is strictly independent of the specific text involved.

Obviously, my examples are now going some way from the notion of music working directly like first-person speech, but there is a connection to the degree that the first-person mode implies something actual that happens in the present of both speaker and listener. Such music provides 'more reality' when harnessed to the represented speakers but also brings a limited sense of its own presence. Could the music have presence in the third-person, narrational sense, too? After all, just as it can amplify first-person utterances, it can also do the same for third-person narrative, as is so clearly the case with the Evangelist's lines in both Passions. But does it have an *independent* third-person function, analogous to that of the Gospel narrator who thereby speaks with authority or even omniscience? Such a narrator is outside the world brought to presence by the text, speaking in our own present, but simultaneously the means by which that world becomes knowable at all.

It is unlikely that any music can have the sort of narrative voice that imparts information (other than very exceptionally), but the issue might be different if we look at it from the point of view of the sort of *authority* third-person narrative brings (just as the musical 'first person' is really a

³⁹ In the final performing version of the Matthew Passion (c. 1742), Bach added a viola da gamba to the recitative and aria 'Mein Jesus schweigt' and 'Geduld' (34–35), apparently in addition to the other continuo instruments, rather than (as is customarily assumed) as a substitute. Thus the appearance of the viola da gamba in 57 in an entirely solo capacity (and in the preceding arioso) would still have sounded relatively new.

sense of presence rather than a human voice as such). In other words, the more authoritative the music seems, the more it takes on the aura of a powerful narrator who sits somewhat outside the action, making it all happen, so to speak. Perhaps Bach's formal structures in the longer choruses and arias could be heard as forms of authority. Fugal or imitative procedure is no longer the single essential constructive substance of this music as it would have been in the era of Renaissance polyphony; instead, imitation is something that is appropriated for particular ends in a variety of contexts. The fugal writing for 'Wir haben ein Gesetz' (John Passion, 21f) is apt for depicting a crowd of rule-bound clerics, but the thoroughness of the permutation-fugue procedure (by which three lines of music are rotated in turn throughout the four voices) has an obvious logic of its own. The music has a degree of authority over and above that which it depicts or represents. Similarly, the final choruses of both Passions are very obvious dance forms, sarabandes in rondo form (John Passion) or da capo form (Matthew Passion), which bring their own trajectories and matching phrases, independently of the text.

Most of the forms of the arias pay some degree of attention to da capo principles, which bring their own sense of shape and trajectory, even when the A section returns unmodified.⁴⁰ Those arias in which Bach modifies the form by rewriting the second A section (with, for instance, allusions to fragments of material from the B section in 'Zerfließe, mein Herze', JP 35, or 'Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder', MP 42; see p. 90) show the sort of trajectory of an independent narrative, with its own beginning, middle and ending, the latter part synthesizing elements that were previously separate. It is perfectly feasible to assimilate this musical narrative to the text concerned, perhaps in the way that it might seem to fill out the emotional implications of specific words or phrases. This is surely what any listener intent on constructing the meaning or emotion of any aria or chorus is likely to do. But the musical process is one that is parallel to the text rather than essentially subservient to it; it is even potentially detachable from it (hence the way in which many of Bach's arias and choruses can be reused with new texts). What I am suggesting, then, is that the music can be heard as representing, even activating, a type of authority parallel to that of a narrator, through its own autonomous potential. The reason I relate this to narration (rather than simply first-person presence)

⁴⁰ See Berger, *Bach's Cycle*, pp. 50–1, and his 'Die beiden Arten von Da-Capo-Arien in der Matthäus-Passion', *BfB* 92 (2006), 127–59.

is that it can be a musical argument played out in time, with its own sense of direction and recall. Moreover, just like the third-person narrator of a novel, it is the musical forms of arias and choruses that permit the first-person voices to sound in the first place. I am not suggesting that this music ‘tells’ us anything – like third-person verbal narrative – rather that the traditional authority of the Evangelist’s narrative (combined with the ‘modern’, novelistic thinking of the eighteenth century) relates to the sense of a specifically musical ‘voice’ that serves to ground and validate the entire content of each Passion.

Tonality as narrative authority

While the ‘authority’ of musical form was something that all composers of Bach’s age could activate to create the sense of an independent narrative ‘voice’ behind any type of text, there is one aspect of Bach’s Passion settings that is exceptional for the 1720s. This is the balance and flow of tonalities throughout each Passion, which is so extensive and striking that it might represent the corollary to Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*, which presents an encyclopedic survey of each key in turn. The Passions thus go on to demonstrate the way keys can be employed within an extensive modulating sequence of movements. The John Passion’s range has E major (and C# minor) as its sharpest tonality, with Bb minor as its flattest, while the Matthew Passion’s range is even more ambitious with G# minor as its sharpest key and Ab minor (the enharmonic equivalent of G# minor) as its flattest. As Eric Chafe notes, only F# major is missing from the twenty-four keys;⁴¹ moreover, seventeen keys provide the tonality for entire movements. In a real historical sense, tonality was the most ‘modern’ means at Bach’s disposal for organizing the shape and narrative potential of the Passions. Tonality, as a system of twenty-four, freely circulating keys, was still of very recent origin in Bach’s age, and still largely unexplored, not least because of the problems this caused for the tuning of keyboard instruments and because of the limited notes available on wind instruments. Indeed, the scale of works such as the Matthew Passion (not only in terms of duration – which was not unusual by operatic standards – but in terms of emotional and stylistic range) was facilitated by the potential of a fully chromatic tonal system.

⁴¹ Chafe, *Tonal Allegory*, p. 391.

Eric Chafe has undertaken the most exhaustive survey of tonality in Bach's Passions, asserting that the areas of keys and the flows between them carry fairly detailed allegorical meaning. It is certainly true that the broader areas of tonality in the John Passion in particular do form a symmetrical pattern throughout the Passion as a whole, with a sharp area at the centre and flat areas at the periphery.⁴² The central area (characterized by the modern, but essentially Johannine, text 'Durch dein Gefängnis', 22, which Friedrich Smend considered the focus of the 'Herzstück', the doctrinal core of the work, framed by symmetrically placed choruses) is certainly striking for its sharp tonality, but this does not necessarily mean that Bach devised the entire key structure to symbolize the cross. But he clearly gave some pre-compositional thought to the way this Passion would be laid out in terms of its tonal areas.

Chafe's observations can undoubtedly be perceptive: the final *catabasis* (a rhetorical term for descent, here applied to keys) of the Matthew Passion, ending a piece that began in E minor in C minor, could indeed suggest that it awaits the resolution which only Easter will provide.⁴³ In the Matthew Passion, flat keys coincide with suffering and the weakness of the flesh, yet they 'also contain important positive associations by way of the feminine, gentler associations of *mollis* (Bethany, Pilate's wife)'.⁴⁴ Downward modulation in the same work represents the 'passive sufferings Jesus undergoes'. On the other hand, 'By extension, the upward direction of Part One concerns the meaning of Jesus' sufferings and the Passion as a whole, while the overall downward motion of the Passion to its C minor close symbolizes all that he suffers at the hands of mankind.'⁴⁵ The cross is represented by sharps, both on account of the notational pun of the cross sign and as a sign of the eventual positive outcome; but the crucifixion itself is represented by flat keys.⁴⁶ But the problem with this sort of interpretation is that the more detailed it becomes, the more contradictory and uncertain it might seem (both sharpward and flatward modulation seeming to relate to Jesus' suffering, for instance).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 319. For a sceptical reaction, see Alfred Dürr, *Johann Sebastian Bach's St John Passion*, trans. Alfred Clayton (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 99–107. Klaus Hofmann, in another critique of Chafe's interpretation of this Passion, notes that Chafe's two axes of symmetry – the turba choruses and key structure – do not really coincide; instead he proposes that the arias (in the first and final versions of the work, at least) form an ingenious tonal system related by thirds, for which everything else forms the modulatory bridges; 'Zur Tonartenordnung der Johannes-Passion von Johann Sebastian Bach', *Musik und Kirche* 61/2 (1991), 78–86.

⁴³ See Eric Chafe, 'J. S. Bach's *St Matthew Passion*: Aspects of Planning, Structure, and Chronology', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 35 (1982), 49–114, esp. 114.

⁴⁴ Chafe, *Tonal Allegory*, p. 396. ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 407. ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

Chafe also assigns specific meanings to the more striking modulations. He relates three of them in the John Passion to instances of the words 'Kreuz' or 'kreuzigen' but, in fact, these instances are not quite so clear-cut (see my discussion of 'Kreuz-' related words on pp. 168–71). While the word 'kreuzigen' is undoubtedly profiled through the rise of an augmented fourth in the John Passion, 21 g, b. 98, this belongs to the A minor tonality (which, as Chafe would acknowledge, is a 'natural' tonality) that was already evident in b. 94; it is the next word, 'Macht', that begins the sharpwards modulation to B minor. The move to flat tonalities in 23 g is not inaugurated by the word 'Kreuz' in b. 84 (this high f' indicating the transitory colouring of A minor); rather this note is part of a flatwards progression that began in the previous bar, one that does not actually reach a key with a flat signature until the next bar. And if it is true that the word 'Kreuze' on d#' is part of a 4/2 chord that inaugurates a sharpward modulation in 27c, b. 71, the first sharp melody note is on the word 'stund' (f#'), part of the same chord.⁴⁷

Yet it is indisputable that some of the modulations can be extremely striking (and were clearly designed to be heard as such), so Chafe is surely right to associate them with particularly emotive moments. These, not surprisingly, often contain references to the cross (it is the symbolism of the specific syllable 'Kreuz-' that I would dispute). The hostile chorus 'Andern hat er geholfen' (Matthew Passion, 58d) ends in E minor, with the taunt that Jesus had claimed to be God's son. This is followed by three bars of recitative stating that the two murderers who were crucified with Jesus also taunted him, which take us to C minor (traversing, in four bars, the tonal ambitus of the Passion as a whole). This leads into the arioso 'Ach Golgatha', now in A^b major and therefore an enormous tonal distance from the E minor end of the chorus. We can hear this as the antithesis between those who taunted Jesus in the past and the highly emotional alto in the present, who meditates on the meaning of Jesus' sacrifice at Golgatha. It was probably this antithesis that led Bach to write a recitative that modulated so widely in such a short space of time rather than any particular symbolism concerning the crucified murderers. The modulation nonetheless underlines the shock we might feel at the callousness of those who themselves were dying on the cross. As Chafe correctly observes, the scene concerning Peter's denial in the Matthew Passion modulates sharpwards as if to underline the increasing tension. The chorale, 37, ends

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 320–2.

in F major, Peter's first denial begins in B \flat and modulates to F (38a, bb. 7–8), his second, a few bars later, is in E minor (38a, bb. 14–15); his third and final one is in F \sharp minor (38c, bb. 23–4). The same sort of sharpward movement is also evident at the equivalent point in the John Passion.⁴⁸

All these instances, which relate to increases in tension at specific points, clearly constitute tonal amplification of an existing verbal narrative. It is harder to argue that they constitute a form of musical narrative somehow beyond that already there. However, there may be some instances where tonality *can* create the impression of an independent musical voice. For instance, the recitative in which Jesus prophesies that one of the disciples will later deny him three times (Matthew Passion, 16), is surrounded by two verses of the chorale 'Herzlich tut mich verlangen' (the 'Passion Chorale') in identical harmonizations, but a semitone apart (E major for 15 and E \flat major for 17). The second text, 'Ich will hier bei dir stehen', expresses the Christian's pledge to stand by Jesus even in the pains of death. Yet the notion of this chorale being sung a semitone lower than it was barely a minute before might suggest that these words are to be heard in a darker light, perhaps with the sense that the human will inevitably fail. In other words, the musical setting creates a sense of irony that would not have been evident in the texts alone, which, after all, are traditional Lutheran property. Bach added this second, transposed, verse for the second version of the work, so it was clearly done with some degree of intent.

A sense of 'tonal narration' can also give a different colour to repetitions within the text. This is obvious in the two 'Laß ihn kreuzigen' choruses of the Matthew Passion (45b, 50b), where the second is a tone higher than the first; the increased strain of the voices in the latter setting creates the sense of an increase in tension. Here the musical intensification through transposition does rather more than the text alone could do in profiling these intensifying calls for crucifixion, introduced by 'Sie sprachen alle:' ('They all said') for the first one (45a, bb. 34–5) and 'Sie schrieen aber noch mehr und sprachen:' ('They cried yet more and said') for the second (50a).

Transposition can also play a gentler role in underlining the progress of the events in time. At the opening of the John Passion narrative, the two 'Jesum von Nazareth' choruses (2b, 2d) musically reflect the repetition of the high priests' and Pharisees' servants' call for 'Jesus of Nazareth', where

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 323–9, 416.

the principal musical change is the move from G minor to C minor. There is something analogous here, perhaps, to the way a speaker might modulate his voice between repetitions of identical text. There is also the sense of passing narrative time, the tonal journey realizing a sort of forward movement that could not be sensed in the text alone (or even in spoken drama). We might even imagine that the crowd of clerics calling twice for 'Jesus of Nazareth' would not necessarily have articulated their second question in a 'different key' since they were not themselves aware that they were playing a part in a broader narrative, with a specific, relentless trajectory. The musical transposition thus imparts a sense of organizing narrative that the reality of the situation – as it actually occurred – might not have possessed.

One way of developing the possibility of tonality being used on a larger scale as the instrument of an independent musical 'voice' takes its lead from a specific issue that Chafe's approach leaves unexplored. This concerns the actual duration of and rate of flow between each of the various key areas. In the John Passion, for instance, the opening 'flat' area (i.e. a collection of movements where the key signature is some form of flat signature, usually ranging from one to three flats) is extensive, comprising the opening chorus (*da capo*) and the first two arias. There is therefore a relatively leisurely progression from G minor through its close relatives, returning to G minor at the beginning of the scene featuring Peter's denial (10), where the G minor 'chapter' is ended with a relatively rapid sharpwards move (see Figure 4.1).⁴⁹ The music now remains in A major and its close relatives until the close of Part 1 (14), the opening flat 'chapter' being complemented by a sharp 'chapter'.

However, the first 'natural' area (according to Chafe's terminology), at the outset of Part 2 (from 15 to 17) is extremely short by comparison with the two previous areas, and, as Alfred Dürr would observe, contains a substantial chorus (16b) in D minor, but without the flat in its key signature (i.e. it is notated in the 'Dorian' version of the minor mode). In other words, the balance of tonal areas, indeed of tonality in general, is not based on a smooth, measured progression but can work at several 'tempi' and over differing durations. It is this fluid sense of tonal pace, from the nearly stagnant to the precipitous, that draws attention to tonality as a quasi-independent 'voice' in the Passions. Otherwise – with a smooth, steady progression of keys in whatever direction, the tonal flow

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 308, for Chafe's diagram of the overall key structure.

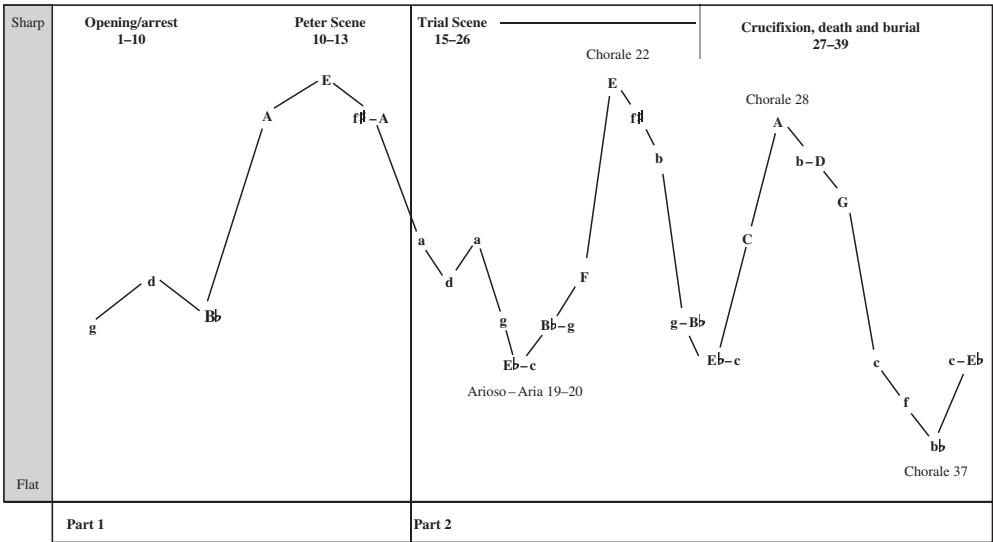


Figure 4.1 John Passion – flow of keys (major keys capitals, minor keys lower case)

would not be so conspicuous as a sort of organizing voice. In the same way that the narration of a novel will range from the even and regular to the swift and elliptical, the varied pace of tonal change gains a degree of authority through the control it exerts on our sense of musical flow. Crucially, the authority gained through tonal flow is something that is entirely peculiar to music and gives to its experience something that is not reducible to any other form of discourse (however much I might make analogies with novelistic narrative).

Already it is clear that tonal flow can also influence the way we hear the interpolated meditations, whether as belonging to the same tonal world as the narrative or standing somewhat apart. Thus, in the first part of the John Passion (with its two large-scale tonal areas), the additions to the Gospel narrative (chorales and the three arias) are entirely integral to the surrounding tonality. ‘Von den Stricken meiner Sünden’ (7) flows out of a tonal context that has been predominantly in D minor for the last few minutes, and the succeeding aria, ‘Ich folge dir gleichfalls’ (9), sounds in close tonal relation (the short recitative, 8, effecting an effortless modulation to Bb major). The third and final aria of Part 1, ‘Ach, mein Sinn’ (13), is entirely of a piece with the sharp area of the Peter scene as a whole, which reaches F# minor at the end of the Evangelist’s celebrated weeping narrative (12c). The ensuing chorale, which ends Part 1, similarly begins in

F# minor (although eventually cadencing in A major), the key that most governs the scene as a whole.

In all, then, the poetic–meditative elements of Part 1 are directly integrated into the tonal narrative of the Gospel text, the listener being encouraged to hear them as of a piece with the story. The tonal tendency is to bind the diverse time zones and texts together as part of a common musical ‘voice’ (split into two ‘chapters’, flat and sharp). We might gain the impression that both ancient and modern texts are grounded by the same musical authority, tonality being essential to the substance of the music that brings the text and its voices to presence. However, things begin to change considerably in the second part, at least in the section that covers the dramatic trial of Jesus before Pilate. Changing the pattern established in Part 1 draws attention to the authority of tonal flow, as something that is not merely a convenient way of achieving musical continuity (see [Figure 4.1](#)).

Turning the A major conclusion of Part 1 into the A minor harmonization of the Phrygian melody ‘Christus, der uns selig macht’ (15), Part 2 begins with a scene in what Chafe describes as the ‘natural’ key area. However, this masks the fact that the musically matching choruses ‘Wäre dieser nicht ein Übeltäter’ and ‘Wir dürfen niemand töten’ (16b, 16d) are placed in D minor and A minor respectively (subdominant and tonic of the broader tonality of A minor),⁵⁰ and they relate to each other tonally as mirror image to the two opening turba choruses of Part 1 (‘Jesum von Nazareth’, 2b, 2d, which were in the tonic and subdominant of the opening tonality of G minor). This analogy is further substantiated by the grafting of the ‘Jesum von Nazareth’ harmonic sequence at the end of ‘Wir dürfen niemand töten’. The sense of a tonal narrator’s modulating voice inflecting the biblical narrative is also evident in the way the longer recitatives themselves modulate: ‘Da führten sie Jesum von Kaipha vor das Richthaus’ (16a) moves sharpwards from D minor towards A minor and G major as the Evangelist describes how Jesus was led in front of the courthouse. Pilate’s question about the nature of the accusation returns to A minor and the Evangelist’s introduction of the chorus ‘Wäre dieser’ returns to D minor. In this ten-bar segment, then, the tonal flow does not necessarily mirror the specific contours of the verbal narrative, but rather suggests a sort of roundedness, giving the little scene both a cohesion and a trajectory ([Example 4.1](#)). The roundedness of this musical ‘paragraph’ is also played out over the course of the broader ‘chapter’ of the tonal area

⁵⁰ See Dürr’s critique, cited in note 42, above.

Evangelist

Tenor

Da fuh-re-ten sie Je-sum von Ka-i-pha vor das Richt-haus, und es war frii-he. Und-sie

Continuo

6 7⁵ 6⁴₂

4

gin-gen nicht in das Richt-haus, auf daB sie nicht un-rein wu-r-den, son-der-n O-ster-n es-sen moech-ten.

8 7⁵ 6 6⁴₂ 6 6⁴₂ 5⁴_#

7

Pilatus

Bass

Da ging Pi-la-tus zu ih-nen her-aus und sprach: Was brin-get ihr fu-r Kla-ge wi-der die-sen

8 7[#] 6[#] 7[#]

10

Tenor Evangelist

Men-schen? Sie ant-wor-te-ten und spra-chen zu ihn:

8 7[#]

Example 4.1 John Passion, recitative 'Da fuhreten sie Jesum von Kaipha vor das Richthaus', 16a

centred around A minor (which likewise moves from A minor to D minor, and back, delineated by the chorales 15 and 17).

The A minor chorus 'Wir du-rfen niemand toeten' is followed by another A minor recitative (16e), which, like 16a, is also rounded, including the pictorial touch of the minor mode at the mention of the type of death Jesus has prophesied he would die (b. 62), followed by a move flatwards (bb. 64–5). The opening of Jesus' protracted conversation with Pilate brings with it an increase in tonal change: A minor (bb. 68–70); E minor (bb. 71–4); back to A minor (bb. 74–6); a touch of the relative major for Jesus' articulation of the war-like affect in b. 77 (the trumpet-like arpeggios obviously working best in the major, 'meine Diener wu-rden darob kaempfen'); and returning to A minor via a brief reference to D minor (Example 4.2).

59 Evangelist
Tenor
Auf daß er - ful - let wür - de das Wort Je - su, wel - ches er sag - te da er deu - te - te, wel - ches

62
To - des er ster - - - ben wür - de. Da ging Pi - la - tus wie - der hin - ein in das Richt - haus und rief

65 Pilate Evangelist Jesus
Bass Tenor Bass
Je - su und sprach zu ihm: — Bist du der Jü - den Kö - nig? Je - sus ant - wor - te - te: Re - dest

68 Evangelist Pilate
Tenor Bass
du das von bir selbst, o - der ha - bens dir an - de - re von mir ge - sagt? Pi - la - tus ant - wor - te - te; Bin ich ein

71 Evangelist
Tenor
Jü - de? Dein Volk und die Ho - hen - prie - ster ha - ben dich mir ü - ber - ant - wor - tet; was hast du ge - tan? Je - sus ant -

74 Jesus
Bass
wor - te - te: Mein Reich ist nicht von die - ser Welt; wä - re mein Reich von die - ser Welt, mei - ne Die - ner wür - den dar - ob —

77
kämp - fen, daß ich den Jü - den nicht ü - ber - ant - wor - tet wür - de; a - ber nun ist mein Reich nicht von dan - nen.

Example 4.2 John Passion, recitative 'Auf daß erfüllt würde das Wort Jesu', 16e

The details are generally immaterial (other than the two obvious instances of word-painting – for the manner of Jesus' death and the fighting of his servants); what is significant is the way this recitative (16e) uses a tonally more elaborate version of the strategy in the earlier one (16a), hinting at the faster tonal pace to come, while preserving the overall poise of the A minor 'chapter' as a whole. The A minor 'chapter' is closed with the chorale 'Ach großer König', exactly the same melody that closed the G minor chapter at the beginning of Part 1 (3, 'O große Lieb'). With their rounded tonality, paired choruses and matching closing chorales, Part 1's G minor chapter and Part 2's A minor chapter are clearly parallel, but with the latter more extended and tonally developed. The relationship is also stressed by the twofold repetition of the 'Jesum von Nazareth' music, first at the end of 16d and (in the next, flatter, scene) in 18b. These are placed a fourth apart in A minor and D minor, just as they were placed in G minor and C minor at the outset of Part 1.

Now that we have a premonition of the sort of tonal change that is about to happen, the recitative following the A minor 'chapter', 18, 'Da sprach Pilatus zu ihm', continues the relatively fluid tonal movement of the previous recitative, but now without returning to its 'natural' starting point of C major.⁵¹ Indeed, it ends in G minor, having visited D major (b. 8), B minor (b. 10), D major and E minor (bb. 11–14), through A minor and down to D minor for the short chorus 'Nicht diesen' (the 'Jesum von Nazareth' music again, 18b, forming a pair with the same music in the previous 'chapter', at the end of the chorus 16d, 'Wir dürfen niemand töten'). It is Pilate's scourging of Jesus that takes us down to G minor, the move to flat keys reinforced by the precipitous descent to C minor in b. 26, at the beginning of the word 'geißelte' (Example 4.3).

The two 'modern' poetic texts that follow, the arioso 'Betrachte, meine Seel' (19) and the extensive aria 'Erwäge, wie sein blutgefärbter Rücken' (20), are in E♭ major and C minor respectively, and therefore follow in the flatter tonality that was only fully established, at the last moment, in the short scourging scene. Although the preceding recitatives alluded to flat tonal areas, and two choruses (16b and 18b) were in D minor, there is certainly the sense that the music has changed gear – there has been a

⁵¹ Chafe, in *Tonal Allegory*, p. 308, appropriately terms this recitative a 'modulatory' section, standing between his proposed natural and flat areas. Having said this, most of the recitatives in Part 1 also modulate, albeit within the larger tonal ambitus to which they belong. Nevertheless, Chafe labels only the recitative 10 as 'modulatory', because this, like 18, also effects a modulation between two types of key signature.

Example 4.3 shows a musical score for a recitative from the John Passion. The score is for Tenor and Continuo. The Tenor part is in treble clef, and the Continuo part is in bass clef. The music is in 8/8 time. The lyrics are: 'Bar-ra-bus a-ber war ein Mör-der. Da nahm Pi-la-tus Je-sum und gei- Bel-te ihn.' The score includes figured bass notation for the Continuo part.

Example 4.3 John Passion, recitative 'Barrabas aber war ein Mörder', 18e

much faster rate of flatwards drop than before – and that the two meditative pieces firmly confirm that change, through their duration. This move to the listener's present is much more jarring than the three arias of Part 1 might have prepared us to expect. We might infer, then, that the pace is quickening and that the meditations in the present now relate more angularly to the tonal scheme of the surrounding narrative, as if we are thrown into the narrative world at the last possible moment.

The recitative 'Und die Kriegsknechte flochten eine Krone von Dornen' (21a) represents the beginning of what Smend and, later, Chafe describe as the 'Herzstück' (the famous symmetrical arrangement of movements centring on the doctrinally significant madrigalian text 'Durch dein Gefängnis', 22). Tonally, though, it belongs to the flatter area that began some time before, at the end of the recitative 18c. Nevertheless, unlike the relatively mild movement through keys that we have hitherto experienced in previous tonal areas, here it is clearly part of a sharpening trajectory, introducing the first of the symmetrically placed choruses, 'Sei begrüßet', in B \flat major. As Pilate begins to remonstrate with the accusers, finding no fault in Jesus (21c, bb. 18–23), the tonality moves to D minor, then, in a typical offsetting movement, down to F minor when Pilate says 'Sehet, welch ein Mensch!' (b. 26). The next chorus, 'Kreuzige!', maintains the sense of flattening undertones, based as it is in G minor but with an immediate suggestion of C minor and (later, in bb. 32–3) of F minor. But the overall G minor tonality helps to set up the next sharpwards movement to F major (the chorus 'Wir haben ein Gesetz', 21f). Pilate's exasperated return to Jesus and questions regarding Jesus' origins and his own power to set Jesus free (21g) are accompanied by an increasing (and accelerating) sharpening, through D minor and A minor towards

B minor (b. 99). Jesus' enigmatic reference to how Pilate's power comes from above and, were this not to have been so, those who handed he himself over would have the greater sin (bb. 99–104) is accompanied by the most sharpward move so far (to C# minor). This leads to the statement of Pilate's desire to find a way of setting Jesus free, concluding in E major. This is clearly a very different pace of tonal narrative from that set up at the beginning of Part 2 (16a to 16e) where each narrative segment was tonally rounded.

Just as the previous meditative texts (the arioso 19 and the aria 20) were set up by a sudden flatwards modulation, the text 'Durch dein Gefängnis' is set in the very recently established sharp tonality of E major. While C. H. Postel, who wrote this dogmatically charged text (namely, that our freedom comes through Jesus' necessary captivity – the 'satisfaction' theory of Atonement), would have intended this to be set as an aria, Bach adapted it to a straightforward chorale melody in E major. This was presumably to avoid breaking the dramatic tension of the trial scene, the surprising modulation perhaps making up for the chorale melody's comparative brevity. But the sense of urgency implied by the quickening sharpwards movement and the comparative jolt towards E major suggest that the meditative moment comes right out of the turn of events in the story (taking its lead from Pilate's contemplation of how he could potentially free Jesus).

After this point, the music for the choruses begins to recur in reverse order, and now in the flatwards direction. Beginning in E major ('Läsesst du diesen los', 23b), the following short recitative ('Da Pilatus das Wort hörete', 23c) takes us, via F# minor and A major, to F# minor for the chorus 'Weg, weg mit dem', 23d. 'Wir haben keinen König', 23f (the last use of the 'Jesus vom Nazareth' music), takes us to B minor. The recitative 23g moves precipitously from B minor to G minor, continuing the flattening trend, but with greater acceleration, just in the last three bars (bb. 85–8) when Golgatha, the place of execution, is named (parallel to the way the recitative before 'Durch dein Gefängnis' suddenly accelerated sharpwards). The next aria text, 'Eilt, ihr angefochtenen Seelen', 24, in G minor, begins in a tonality that has only just been established. This continues the pattern of the previous meditations of Part 2 (19–20, 22) (and thus is totally unlike the pattern of the three of Part 1), by which the arias of the Leipzig present are presented in a tonal world prepared only at the last moment, as if we are transported into the narrated world with a degree of violence compatible with the events described.

Now the tonal pace slows considerably. The actual crucifixion (25a) continues the flatwards trend by making a lurch towards B \flat minor (a use of tonality which directly shadows the depressing events of the text), but the last of the repeated choruses, 'Schreibe nicht: der Jüdenkönig' (25b), returns in B \flat major (it is the only one of the three repeating choruses to return in its original key). After this comes the chorale 'In meines Herzens Grunde' (26), its E \flat major tonality perhaps reminding us of the tonality of the poetic sections ('Betrachte, meine Seel', 19; 'Erwäge', 20) that preceded the chorus that 'Schreibe nicht' mirrors ('Sei begrüßet', 21b). Thereafter, as Chafe notes, there is a reference back to the natural area that he outlined at the beginning of Part 2. Here it involves little more than the chorus 'Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen' (27b), after which the move is again sharpwards ('Er nahm alles wohl in acht', 28) in A major. The final moments of Jesus' life, in the recitative 'Und von Stund an' (29), remain in the same tonal area, cadencing in F \sharp minor. This sets up the B minor for the next aria 'Es ist vollbracht' (30), the first aria in Part 2 that is not heralded by a sudden tonal jolt. The two bars announcing Jesus' death (31) lead straight into the next aria, 'Mein teurer Heiland' (32), in the closely related tonality of D major. This pairing of arias seems directly reminiscent of the first two arias of the work ('Von den Strikken', 7; and 'Ich folge dir gleichfalls', 9), also separated by a very short recitative and in major and minor tonalities a third apart (there D minor, followed by B \flat major; here B minor, followed by D major, thus carrying on the theme of mirroring previous movements). In all, the entire sharp 'chapter', from 28 to 33, presents an area of comparative stability complementing the stable flat area that opens Part 1. Just as then, the two arias are integrated into the prevailing tonality. Here then we may gain the impression of the tonal narrator returning to a previous mode of presentation, even if the content of the events and meditation is now very different.

There is one more change of pace, as the arioso 'Mein Herz' (34) meditates on the earthquake just depicted in a short dramatic recitative (33), describing how the whole of nature seems to have been ruptured by Jesus' death. The tonal journey continues the flatwards descent of the earthquake recitative (which was in E minor), leading towards C major. This unexpectedly becomes the dominant for the final aria, 'Zerfließe, mein Herze, in Fluten der Zähren' (35), which, in F minor, introduces the most sudden tonal change at the outset of any aria within the work. Perhaps this is to shock the listener into an emotional state that appears as suddenly and violently as the natural events just depicted. After this point, the music remains in a fairly stable flat area (hitting again the flattest point

of B \flat minor at the end of the recitative, 36, where the Evangelist affirms how the Scriptures prophesied that Jesus' bones were not to be broken and that he was to be pierced with a spear); the final chorus and chorale are in C minor and E \flat major respectively.

There are several conclusions to draw from this survey. First, the flow of tonality has something in common with the way Bach reuses music, sometimes in parallel to what happened before, sometimes in mirror image, but the cycles of tonality retain a degree of independence from other forms of recurrence (only with 'Schreibe nicht', 25b, is there an exact tonal analogy with the previous use of this music in 'Sei gegrüßet', 21b: both are in B \flat major). Second, the flow of keys increases considerably in the trial scene, with a definite trajectory that is not so evident in the other sharp or flat areas of the piece. This is precisely the scene in which the action takes place in what is closest to 'real' time, without any gaps or contractions. Constantly changing tonality in a sharpwards or flatwards direction is the form of tonal narrative that seems to come nearest to evoking events happening as if in real time and place (following the traditional 'unities'). Conversely, the time from Jesus' crucifixion to his death and then to his burial is necessarily abbreviated in John's text, as is Part 1, which covers the time from Jesus' arrest in the garden to Peter's denial and remorse. The slower movement of keys in these outer sections thus compensates for the relatively elliptical and contracted nature of the text. In all, the tonal flow is of a piece with the sort of roundedness that I have observed for this Passion in [Chapter 2](#) (see p. 105), the comparatively static outer sections surrounding the central trial, with its striking tonal narrative.

The listener is deposited in the 'present' of the meditative texts in a way that seems connected with the rate of tonal change. Four meditative areas (19–20, 22, 24 and 35) coincide with the most striking and sudden changes of key, the remaining meditative areas (the choruses and arias 1, 7, 9, 13, 30, 32 and 39) being more of a piece with the surrounding tonality. All the examples of sudden tonal change are found in Part 2, but these are interspersed with two arias that seem in their pairing to parallel the first two of Part 1 (30, 32), with the final chorus also paralleling the opening chorus in terms of its tonal integration with its surroundings.

The tonal planning of the Matthew Passion is perhaps less obviously structured than that of the John Passion,⁵² but it displays several significant similarities and differences ([Figure 4.2](#)). First, there are parallel tonal

⁵² See *ibid.*, pp. 391–423, for Chafe's scheme for the Matthew Passion.

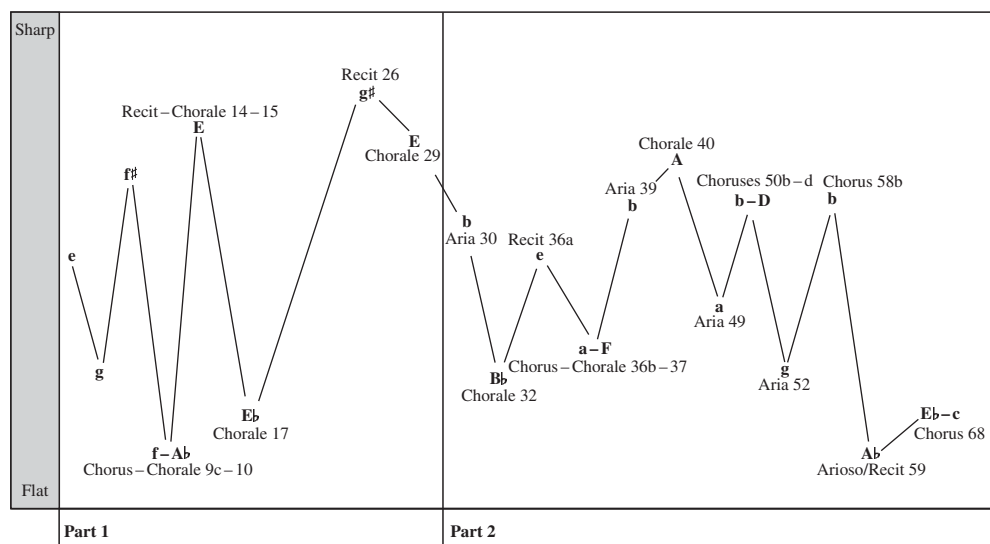


Figure 4.2 Matthew Passion – flow of keys (major keys capitals, minor keys lower case)

patterns, such as the three flat areas contrasting with the prevailing sharp tonality of Part 1, as outlined by Chafe.⁵³ He suggests that these correspond with failings of the disciples: the first accompanies the disciples' complaint about the woman anointing Jesus (4d, 'Wozu dienet dieser Unrat') and Jesus' rebuke (4e), ending with Jesus' statement that the woman's deed will be remembered, which returns us to the home tonality of E minor. The second flat area is more extensive, corresponding to Jesus' prediction of his betrayal by Judas (9c), hitting its nadir of B \flat minor with the depiction of the disciples' troubled state (9d). The successive movements, leading through the institution of the Last Supper to Jesus' prophecy of his resurrection and return to Galilee (14), move steadily sharpwards to E major, as if in resolution of the opening tonality. But the third flat area follows soon after, with Jesus' prophecy of Peter's denial, together with the ironic repeat of the chorale harmonization of 15 (E major) as 17 ('Ich will hier bei dir stehen', E \flat major). From here the tonality begins to ascend gradually, through the Gethsemane scene and Jesus' troubled state. But as his confidence in God's will rises and as the moment of his betrayal draws near, the modulation becomes quicker (e.g. the recitative 24, 'Und er kam zu seinen Jüngern', which begins in F major and ends in B minor). Indeed, the sharpest moment in the Passion as a

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

whole (G# minor) coincides with Jesus' announcement of the arrival of the betrayer, Judas (26, bb. 13–16). The eventual arrival of the chorale fantasia closing Part 1, 'O Mensch, bewein' (29) in E major, which centres so clearly on the human admission of guilt for the betrayal of Jesus, suggests some sort of resolution to the opening tonality (see [Figure 4.2](#)).

The tonal pattern of Part 2 recalls that of Part 1 by presenting flat areas initially as parallel contrasts to the repeating cycles of sharper tonality (beginning with 30, 'Ach, nun ist mein Jesus hin', in B minor). The first modulation begins hot on the heels of this opening aria, at the point at which the high priests and elders seek false testimony against Jesus (31, from b. 12). The aria 'Geduld' (35) in A minor begins the return to sharper tonalities. Jesus' final long statement, prophesying what will happen when he will sit at the right hand of the power (36a, bb. 7–13) seems to bring the tonality back to the starting tonic of E minor (see [Example 2.5](#) on p. 143), but the calls for his death (36b) are propelled by another flatwards move. The scene with Peter, exactly like that in the John Passion, moves progressively sharpwards (38a–39), returning to the opening tonality of Part 2 with 'Erbarme dich' (39, in B minor).

Much of the ensuing music remains in sharp tonalities with occasional flat touches (e.g. the reference to the potter's field and Pilate's brief conversation with the taciturn Jesus, 43, bb. 9–24). As Chafe notes, this allows Pilate to sing the word 'hart' on the reintroduction of G# in the melody line (b. 26, although it was already in the bass in b. 25), playing on the old association of sharps with 'Dur' (the hard). But it also enables a sharpening effect towards D major in the last three bars, when Pilate becomes filled with wonderment (reminiscent of the move towards E major that accompanies Pilate's thoughts on releasing Jesus in the John Passion, 21g, bb. 104–6). Most of the remaining trial scene is depicted with increasing sharpness (the A minor aria 'Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben', 49, providing a sort of 'natural' oasis between the paired 'Laß ihn kreuzigen' choruses in progressively sharper keys).

The most striking flattening so far occurs with the alto arioso 'Erbarm es Gott!' (51), which begins in F major, directly following from the statement of Jesus' final commitment to crucifixion (50e) in E minor. This moves sharpwards again, into F# minor before slipping at the last moment to G minor. The tonality remains in flat keys until the end of 'Komm, süßes Kreuz' (57), returning sharpwards at the point at which Jesus is crucified (58a, b. 7) and seeming, by the end of 'Andern hat er geholfen' (58d), to have settled back into the home tonality of E minor. But this return is proved extremely shortlived by the short recitative narrating the taunting

of those crucified with Jesus (58e, 'Desgleichen schmäheten ihn auch die Mörder'), which moves to C minor. The arioso 'Ach Golgatha' (59) comes at the moment of this flattening (just as the tonality likewise flattened at the mention of Golgatha in the John Passion) and takes us to the flattest point of the work (A \flat minor, bb. 9–10; this corresponds enharmonically to the sharpest point, G \sharp minor, in the recitative 26 towards the end of Part 1). From now on, the Matthew Passion remains in flat tonalities until its C minor conclusion, far from the E minor that began the work. In other words, the feeling of resolution promised at the end of Part 1 is thwarted, and the flat areas, rather than continuing to provide the tonal opposition that the returns to sharps seemingly resolve, become increasingly predominant; the tonal polarity of the work seems to have become reversed within its course. This might also suggest that the 'voice' of tonality could have more to say, beyond the end of the piece; there is no sense of tonal closure, and the reversed polarity might imply a new cycle within an ever-broadening narrative. Given the increasing scale of the flat areas, this might be interpreted theologically to imply a sort of infinity that can only be concluded by the 'end times', which have been intimated at several points within the text of the Passion.

Another point of comparison with the John Passion is the way arias are introduced tonally, whether embedded within the prevailing tonality or introduced by an abrupt key change. The arias that are not preceded by ariosos (i.e. accompanied recitatives) are generally of a piece with the general tonal direction preceding them (e.g. 'Blute nur', 8; 'Erbarme dich', 39; 'Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder', 42). In cases where the aria is preceded by an arioso, it is usually the arioso that effects a significant modulation, particularly in Part 2 (as I have noted, Part 2 of the John Passion also introduces striking modulations towards the arias). The prime example of this is the arioso already mentioned, 'Erbarm es Gott!', 51; this seems to continue the practice that Bach established in the arioso 'Mein Herz' in the John Passion, 34, which moved from G major to the dominant of F minor. The majority of ariosos in the Matthew Passion modulate between what went before and the ensuing aria (the first one, 'Du lieber Heiland, du', 5, begins in B minor, following on from the E minor cadence of the previous recitative, and moves to F \sharp minor, the key of 'Buß und Reu', 6). The only two ariosos that do not modulate in this way are the last two. 'Ach Golgatha' (59), which begins and ends in A \flat major, is most striking for its internal modulations, taking the tonality to the lowest point in the piece (A \flat minor). The return to A \flat major at the end is perhaps even more of a surprise than had the piece left us elsewhere. And the final aria, 'Mache

dich' (65), is preceded by an arioso that is in G minor at both beginning and end, 'Am Abend, da es kühle war'. This seems of a piece with the considerable deceleration of key change once the final flat area has been established, the tonality moving relatively gently from the A \flat major of 'Wahrlich, dieser ist Gottes Sohn gewesen' (63b) towards the C minor of the concluding chorus. This comparative stability might contribute both to the feeling of reconciliation that the aria 'Mache dich' brings and also to the sense that the 'flat phase' could extend beyond the conclusion of the piece.

Some conclusions

This chapter has covered a very broad range of issues relating to different kinds of voice and authority. First, in Bach's original scoring for both Passions, the core singers play multiple roles and embody widely differing subject positions. In this respect, Bach's scoring seems archetypically 'pre-modern', with no sense of the consistent voice or character that would be essential to the more 'modern' genre of opera. On the other hand, in performance the emphasis is thrown strongly on the actual vocal presence of these four principal singers (and, in the Matthew Passion, on the second four, too). They gain a sense of authority in their own right, almost akin to authors who customarily have to assume different voices in order to create a stimulating narrative. Given that these singers take no specific character roles beyond Jesus and the Evangelist (with one very small exception),⁵⁴ they seem to belong more to the present than to the past and perhaps invite our reciprocal participation in making real the lessons of the story. The remaining historical personages are allotted to singers who have no other role to play and consequently sound as if they belong to a different, seemingly remote, world. It is as if the historical particulars of the story are sifted from its enduring significance for the Christian.

The performance goes beyond the concept of representation – the mediated presentation in the present of a prior event – towards something that is uniquely happening in the present.⁵⁵ This would, after all, be

⁵⁴ This is the passage for the two false witnesses in the Matthew Passion, 33 ('Er hat gesagt'), which was assigned to the alto and tenor of choir 2.

⁵⁵ As Ruth HaCohen perceptively puts it, 'When such a conflation of planes and personae occurs, it often gives rise to "oratorical moments" . . . [that] show forth a vocalized alchemy in which a voice (or voices) from a certain time, context and configuration pierce through series of pasts, presents or futures – or a mixture thereof, carrying embedded existential layers, and project them onto an ever-renewed present tense.' 'Vocal Fictions – The Music Libel Against the Jews' (MS, in preparation), Chapter 3.

consonant with the religious intention of making the Word alive in the act of speaking it. Through the changing of roles and the integration of chorales, which traditionally speak with a communal voice, the Passions go as far they possibly can in encouraging the listener to become part of the variegated world they create. Just as the singer of an aria can evoke a figure in the present who responds strongly to an event in the Passion story in which he or she simultaneously plays a part, the listener is encouraged to connect the stimulus of the dramatic representation of Scripture with immediate response in the present. The combination of the potent generic resources of opera with the traditional Protestant imperative that the congregation be personally involved in the faith-renewing mechanism of liturgy implies a type of listenership that potentially transcends both practices.⁵⁶ This might show some parallel with the sort of anti-theatricality (or, perhaps, 'meta-theatricality') that is sometimes observed in the early modern and pre-aesthetic world of Shakespearian drama. Here, the more fully 'modern' dichotomies of observing subject and aesthetic object are not yet in place, all characters, performers and listeners being embraced by a single but fluid continuum of experience. Just as in Shakespeare's theatre, the experience of the Passion performance is something to be played out directly in one's own life ('all the world plays the actor', according to the motto traditionally ascribed to the Globe Theatre).⁵⁷ This is a long way from the type of art governed by the 'standards of taste' that were beginning to emerge in the literary and musical-critical milieu of Bach's Leipzig, with the school of Gottsched and his musical disciple Scheibe.

Having constituted the listener as someone who is always potentially a participant and having given the event more immediate reality through vocal scoring, there is then the question of how the music performs the role of complementing this reality with a sense of authority. If it can act as a narrative voice in its own right, it can then be heard as something prior to the various texted voices (music being the medium in which they exist for the duration of the performance). While the way the music can work

⁵⁶ This may well demonstrate the crucial component of Rousseau's emerging aesthetic of music, by which music cannot directly represent a given object or topic but, rather, somehow re-creates and stimulates the experience of such objects; its true effect thus lies at one remove from that which it represents or imitates. See Julia Simon, 'Rousseau and Aesthetic Modernity: Music's Power of Redemption', *Eighteenth-century Music* 2/1 (2005), 41–56, esp. 51–2.

⁵⁷ See Charles Whitney, 'Ante-aesthetics: Towards a Theory of Early Modern Audience Response', in Hugh Grady (ed.), *Shakespeare and Modernity – Early Modern to Millennium* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 40–60, esp. pp. 47–8.

mimetically – giving a sense of real presence to the events – is relatively obvious, most striking of all is the role music plays as narrator through the most ‘modern’ element of musical construction: tonality. It is the tonal flow of the music that provides cohesion in the face of gaps or blanks in the text, just as it does for changes of voice or narration. In other words, the music has the potential to create a sense of integrated time and action that is not possible at the textual level alone. While there are obvious moments where music’s tonal narrative voice can underline a particular striking event in the text (through a sudden modulation), it provides the illusion of an authority underlying all the multiple levels of text, personage and voice through its independent forms of patterning and contrast. This sort of authority has something in common with what music theorists see as the ‘will’ unfolded in the gestures of melody.⁵⁸ The tonality sets up a certain pace and direction only to change these in a variety of ways, recombining them and recalling past strategies. Bach’s use of tonality as a way of creating contrast resonates with Walter Benjamin’s observation that contrast is dominant in Baroque drama, a form of artifice that is often overwhelming in its effect, as a vivid means of bringing that which is depicted or signified into view.⁵⁹ Certainly, much of the free poetry in Bach’s Passions evidences the early eighteenth-century penchant for dichotomies (as in the text of ‘Durch dein Gefängnis’, JP 22, where Jesus’ captivity brings our release, his cell becomes a throne of grace; all of these create a graphic sense of the mechanism of salvation according to the traditional theory of atonement).

The two Passions show that Bach constituted the ‘tonal narrator’ in two different ways. The John Passion not only presents several tonal areas of relative sharpness and flatness, but also shows a pronounced acceleration in tonal flow at the point where the action in time is most realistic (the trial before Pilate). It is here that the meditative pieces are set off in keys that have only just been reached, as if forcing the listener to step into the immediate world of the action and then holding up the events for a few minutes. The Matthew Passion does not present such a striking contrast between relatively stable tonal areas and those that modulate swiftly, more an oscillation between its opening sharp tonality and movements flatwards (which can indeed accelerate if the action itself presses forward in time).

⁵⁸ Naomi Cumming, ‘The Subjectivities of “Erbarne Dich”’, *Music Analysis* 16/1 (1997), 5–44, esp. 10.

⁵⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 1963), trans. John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 231.

This may reflect the fact that the biblical narrative is itself considerably fuller and more consistent than John's, moving at a relatively even pace. Nevertheless, the moves flatward become increasingly precipitous, sharpward movement often coinciding with episodes of increasing tension in the story. Moreover, the duality between sharp and flat narrative is gradually reversed, so that the work ends in a different tonal space from that in which it began (in the flat key of C minor). The different tonal trajectories of the two Passions parallel the differences in their attitudes towards time, as examined in [Chapter 2](#): the ultimate return to flat tonalities in the John Passion points to its ultimate roundedness and completion (as Jaroslav Pelikan notes, the Gospel's accent on Christ as victor means that the resurrection is already wound into its theology); the Matthew Passion's approach suggests rather a linear approach to time, in which Christ's sacrifice leads to a fundamentally different state of affairs.⁶⁰

One obvious objection to my approach is that even a musically trained listener will not be able to follow the modulations I have outlined, at least not in the detail that can be read from a study of the score. Moreover, it is impossible to guess how listeners of Bach's own time might have been able to follow the tonal flow, although it is likely that the radically advanced scheme of keys would have sounded in striking contrast to the musical norm of the day (not least in the intonation of the wind instruments in the more remote keys).⁶¹ My point lies in the sense of authority that the tonal structure might convey, something analogous to the narrative techniques of literature, by which a story unfolds and the reality of its characters becomes convincing.⁶² These might include subtle changes of voice, tense, person, or the ways the narrative might manipulate the flow of time; none of these would be immediately evident to the untutored reader, but the latter would surely not intuit a sense of authority or reality without them. Similarly, a modern filmgoer will not normally be aware of the rate of cutting, or the contrasts of viewpoint and angle in shooting a film, but

⁶⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Bach among the Theologians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), esp. pp. 114–15.

⁶¹ As Kevorkian notes, the type of listening in both religious and musical venues of Bach's time would be foreign to most modern classical practice, but the fact that services and their music were not witnessed in total silence does not mean that careful listening was impossible; *Baroque Piety*, p. 41. The congregations were not as uniform as is often assumed, and different members of the congregation might have had different levels of attention and different priorities in what they considered worth listening to; *ibid.*, pp. 51–2.

⁶² Blumenberg, *Matthäuspasion*, p. 45, suggests that it is the theological 'generosity' of Bach's Matthew Passion music that makes it unthinkable to question the Gospel text.

these undoubtedly influence the way we view the scenario, creating a sense of authority that we often take for granted.

Returning to my original questions about the sorts of speaker different listeners might discern, it may now be possible to understand how different forms of listening can operate. For instance, the Passions encourage one to hear the voice of the original Evangelist (indeed the 'word of God') through the combination of realistic imitation and the sort of authority that the musical narrative seems to develop. Just as Matthew and John used various rhetorical and narrative devices to render their testimony more convincing (and which are precisely those of fiction), Bach's settings seem to capitalize on the narrative potential of music, particularly through the emerging artificial system of tonality.

It is certainly possible to imagine that what one hears behind the various patterns and strategies of the music is the voice of Bach. However, given the dispersal of authority over so many levels both in the notated music and in the way it is performed, it is difficult to infer more than the general sense of an organizing presence behind the music. To the extent that this music is novelistic, in Bakhtin's sense of a variety of languages and voices that interanimate one another, there is no single language that belongs to the composer alone.⁶³ Rather, Bach represents the central nexus of intersecting voices, thrown up from the dialogic texture of his music and its textual levels. The illusion of the composer as a specific musical voice can be inferred in the course of the music, just like the voice of the Evangelist or God himself. This sort of listening is perhaps akin to a theological activity, mobilizing the mechanisms of inference to intuit an intended coherence and consistency.⁶⁴

Given that music might be heard to embody a sort of authoritative, narrating voice with its own repertoire of 'tones', as if grounding the reality of everything that happens, it is easy to see why music, by its very nature, shares so many things with the religious sensibility. But it is equally easy to see why some have been so opposed to its powerful presence, as a potential distraction from verbal, biblical truth. If the increasing rationality of music – particularly in the tonal system – can profitably serve as a tool for religious meditation, it also opens up the possibility of a reality separate from any assumed religious truths. Ironically, this music seems to gain power through its artifice, through the capitalization of forms and

⁶³ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination – Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 48–9.

⁶⁴ See Barthes, 'Listening', p. 249.

tonal structuring that were taking composers such as Bach away from the concept of music as the direct, unmediated, voice of nature.

Given that this music can transcend its original context and function, the voices we find might seem to reflect what we want to hear. Virtually every gesture in them is a hook for some aspect of belief. This is a music that engages the mechanics of fiction in the service of faith, tempting us to cultivate belief through the reality of the musical experience. Yet its artifice takes on a life of its own, challenging us to hear further and imagine alternatives to our initial assumptions. Bach's music sits on the cusp of change from a type of music that is designed to confirm a specific identity and set of beliefs through its rhetorical purpose, to one that works dialectically in pitting different forms of authority against one another without bringing total closure (this will be the central issue of the final chapter). In the Passions we are confronted with supremely human voices that miraculously seem to join our present to the scriptural past. But there is also a chance that this sort of music might lead us towards a state of mind or attitude that we had not anticipated.

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5 | Between rhetoric and dialectic – Bach's inventive stance

Much of my approach so far has been to investigate ways in which the music of Bach's Passions can make things happen for a potential listener in real time, through the interplay of text, music and performer. I have laid particular stress on the various types of subjectivity that the singers help to constitute, how the music creates the sense of an authoritative narrating subject and how these aspects can be mapped by the listener and can work to exercise his or her own sense of being. The final part of my investigation concerns the way the music is extended as a sequence of sonic ideas that we hear played out in the present of a performance.

The starting point here is the concept of rhetoric, an ancient art that is geared towards grasping the attention of the listener, but which is also at the heart of how the orator/composer finds ideas suitable for spinning out the central topics of an oration, giving it a sense of cohesion and direction. This attitude then spills over into performance, which would normally aim to hold our attention through specific gestures and spontaneous embellishments. In the case of a performer as expert as Bach, it is highly likely that his experience as a performer would have informed many aspects of his compositional activity, however abstract or mechanical some of these might seem. The rhetorical approach is a useful way of modifying the customary conception of a composer as a sort of omniscient deity with specific intentions, decreeing once and for all what the music should be, how it should proceed and what it should mean. At the very least, we should surely acknowledge that Bach must have composed in human time, with all the developments, discoveries and changes of mind this inevitably brings. Although he was famously able to discern in an instant the musical possibilities inherent in any particular theme, the actual planning and execution of a composition must have been a more protracted affair (surely borrowing from his activity as a performer and improviser). Intentions there must have been – at countless levels – but not always those that result in an object with a definitive meaning and significance, the perfect execution of a preconceived plan, its relationships and meanings awaiting the analyst who comes closest to divining their truth. The rhetorically grounded composer does not necessarily place originality at a

premium, rather the requirement that the music work for the purpose at hand, stimulating and sustaining our attention.

Yet the unequivocally Romantic discovery of Bach as a 'great composer' surely suggests that later generations sensed something particularly familiar in the music, perhaps the sort of human intelligence that is specifically recognizable to 'modern' subjects with their stronger sense of unique individuality, honed and deepened by various cultural practices. Perhaps this has something to do with the idea of Bach as someone who made judgements about how the music should be put together, as if we sense that every moment is the product of his critical sifting of all the various possibilities. This critical attitude obviously shares much with the rhetorical task of rendering an oration coherent and effective, but goes further than this in the way it seems to interrogate the very substance and internal 'economy' of the music – as if this were a world in its own right. This is not quite the same as the activity we might attribute to a contemplative, pre-modern composer, who might have believed that his music rendered actual the hidden orders of the cosmos (which were 'there all along'). The sort of musical intelligence we might discern in Bach perhaps shows some characteristics of modernity, in the way the 'economies' of individual pieces are developed along trajectories that are both specific to the implications of their musical ideas and somehow alert to the effect these will have in actual performance.

Immediately, though, this statement will engender numerous accusations that I am consequently implying that earlier composers are somehow 'less intelligent' than Bach, or – more seriously – that they are less relevant to our concerns. No one could deny that the music of a Machaut or Josquin evidences composers of obvious musical intelligence, possessing the ability to combine melodic lines with considerable complexity and subtlety, or that the expression found in music of the *seconda prattica* and early operatic repertory comes from composers and performers who managed to embody very human experiences – sometimes startlingly real – in what they left notated. The Baroque forms of mimesis (i.e. the imitation of human gestures and emotions) enabled talented musicians to create musical impersonations of affects that seem to have a remarkable transferability. In other words, these composers (who normally, like Bach, had an extensive experience of performance) tap into basic human urges that remain recognizable – at the very least – through changes of culture and history.

What I am suggesting in the case of Bach is, rather, a sort of intelligence that straddles these inherited intellectual and mimetic-expressive

traditions in a remarkable, individual way. As we discover how a piece unfolds there might almost be the sense that we intuit that someone has 'been there before', someone who is not merely executing a plan, following some form of musical logic or just creating a mood calculated to transport us into a particular state. In other words, while we are able to recognize common human elements in earlier music – such as intellectual skill or the imitation of emotions – there is a third element here, a sort of human presence that is unwittingly particular and as much constructed through the music as reflected in it, and thus contingent on its duration. This is not so much a unique human figure who exists prior to the music and whom the music somehow reveals or skilfully realizes (which is perhaps more common in later stages of modernity) – a sort of self-discovery – but one who is honed through the processes of musical composition, a self-creation out of materials already at hand.

There is no doubt that Bach saw the basic rules of musical harmony as God-given – at least, the sparse surviving verbal testimony from him clearly supports this¹ – and that he was realizing the implications of the rules of consonance and dissonance in the act of combining and extending the musical materials. From this point of view, he was discovering connections within the musical world and confirming the coherence of the cosmos in general, actualizing links that were essentially already there. But this is combined with some sense of how the playing out of his inventions would have an effect on the listener, both emotionally and in terms of expectations; however predetermined the events of a piece may be, they are never entirely predictable. As Laurence Dreyfus has so powerfully shown, here is a composer who has clearly sifted through all the permutations and combinations of his material, discarding those that are flawed or sound inappropriate, but also modifying some of the details to make them work better; some of these modifications bring their own inventive implications which can themselves be among the most striking elements of the piece.²

If Bach's music seems to presuppose inherited musical rules as part of a closed, God-given system, this is somehow combined with the awareness that the potentials within that system are technically infinite, that any

¹ See [Chapter 1](#), note 49.

² Laurence Dreyfus, 'Bachian Invention and Its Mechanisms', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 171–92; Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), esp. pp. 1–32.

particular choice is essentially contingent. The composer's task seems to be to make the best possible realization, bearing in mind several, not necessarily mutually reinforcing, expressive and structural parameters simultaneously. In this respect Bach's compositional personality may be relatively close to the type of God that Leibniz postulates in his *Theodicy* – a creator who sees all the possibilities of his creation in an instant and who has chosen for us the best of all possible worlds. However much local 'dissonance' we might experience, however much imperfection might cause us suffering, it all counts towards the best possible ultimate good, one that could not have been realized in any other way. The absent God is paradoxically ever present, even in the worst possible circumstances.³ One of Leibniz's specific contributions to modernity, surely also shared by Bach, is the notion that the 'forms' of classical metaphysics somehow lie in the internal nature of each thing, rather than in an external system according to which everything unfolds.⁴ God's pre-established order therefore works from the level of the individual monad outwards, rather than from a plan that lies beyond the realized world.

Yet surely Bach's music takes us beyond Leibniz's facile optimism, however grounded, supremely structured and technically confident his music might typically be judged. It is almost as if this music is composed with the Leibnizian intention of creating the best of all possible musical worlds but somehow goes far beyond this by grasping the contingencies of actual experience and evoking a creative figure far more nuanced than the self-satisfied God who can sit back once the best possible of all machines has been set in temporal motion. Bach may indeed have aimed to be Walter Benjamin's Baroque 'man of genius', 'the master of the *ars inveniendi* . . . who could manipulate models with sovereign skill'.⁵ But the results somehow transcend whatever could have been predicted from the models at hand.

One strain of thought that both Bach and Leibniz might partly embody was ignited at the height of medieval scholasticism, but ultimately contributed to the eventual collapse of that system and therefore played its part

³ Peter Smaill (personal communication) notes that several cantata texts develop the idea of a 'hidden' God who is temporarily absent, but paradoxically close to the believer: e.g. Cantata 81, 'Jesus schläft, was soll ich hoffen?'; Cantata 155, 'Mein Gott, wie lang, ach lange?' Something similar is implicit in the surviving text of Bach's lost Mark Passion.

⁴ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self – The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 277.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 1963), trans. John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 179.

in the foundation of modernity. This is the concept of nominalism, developed by the school of William of Occam (c. 1285–1349) – and prophetically named the *via moderna* – which elevated the reality of the particular at the expense of the universal, abstract or ideal. Within the broad bounds that nominalism can imply, individual things take on a greater sense of irreducible immediacy, and cannot merely be explained as the instantiation of a set of transcendent principles or catalogued as the imperfect examples of a perfect idea. It was perhaps a thread from this sort of thinking that eventually enabled specific figures of early modernity, such as Luther, Bacon and Descartes, to believe they could sever the link with past authority and establish fundamental principles afresh on the basis of the individual's direct experience and intuitions. Hans Blumenberg has suggested that it was nominalism's claim that God's creative decision was taken entirely independently of any universal conditions – even reason – that engendered the notion of humankind as marooned in a cosmos that was not necessarily designed for human wellbeing.⁶ Even our salvation became a matter entirely of God's hidden decisions, not something our actions could influence through any predictable system of penance or restitution.

By Bach's time, Leibniz had managed to reconcile a sense of stark particularity, inherited from nominalism, with the Platonist notion of mathematical regularity: while we cannot have any insight into God's creative choices from the infinite variety of things he could have created, had he so wished, the regularities and causality that we both observe and deduce are the direct consequences of the particular choice that God did in fact make. Moreover, because nominalism implies that entities cannot be multiplied beyond what is strictly necessary (nature, as a direct expression of God's will, cannot contain superfluity), the most satisfying situation is that in which the greatest amount of variety is achieved through the most simple or parsimonious of component elements. This was soon to become an essential in aesthetic judgement (usually independent of the notion of God's will), which valued whatever showed the greatest variety together with the highest degree of unity.

Nominalism undoubtedly played a part in the thought of Luther himself: he was educated at the University of Erfurt, which at the end of the fifteenth century was one of the most established centres of the *via moderna* (based on the system of the Augustinian, Gregory of

⁶ Blumenberg, Hans, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (*Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 2nd rev. edn, 1976), trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1983), pp. 150–6.

Rimini).⁷ Luther was therefore brought up not only to question all authority beyond Scripture, but also to temper reason with personal and immediate experience, to believe that reason was only a consequence of God's word and not something that could independently be engaged to test it. Also inherited from this education was Luther's tendency to bring a dialectical approach to his theology, albeit one that did not result in the sort of synthesis that became the aim of dialectics in the post-Enlightenment world of Hegel. The classic instance of Luther's method was his dialectic between Old and New Testaments, between the Law and the salvation of the Gospel: both depend entirely on one another, and even if the salvation of Christ mitigates the strict law of Moses it is still itself dependent on the latter.⁸ Old and New Testaments are thus intimately related without losing their particularity, the dialectic between them remaining ultimately open, and constantly to be renewed in spiritual practice.

When Dreyfus suggests that Bach's music is best understood in the way the implications of each 'invention' are realized, rather than in terms of how it fulfils specific formal procedures common to a much broader repertoire, he may be identifying a specifically nominalist strain in Bach's approach to music. Indeed, it may be this that most clearly distinguishes Bach's music from that of the later 'classical' (and primarily German) tradition, which tends to work around the conventions of formal structures (most typically, sonata form) out of which emerges the organic unfolding of an essential idea. Obviously, there is much in common between Bach's music and that of the succeeding century, too: his music is nothing if it does not play on conventions and, as Dreyfus shows, much is derived from the implications of the fundamental invention underlying each piece. But the difference is that Bach's forms (other than the short, conventional templates, such as chorale and dance, or the basic outline of a da capo aria) are secondary to the potential inflections of the inventive material and cannot be assumed independently, in advance. There is no doubt that Bach's music, inarguably so tightly integrated, appeals directly to the organicism of the Romantic aesthetic (indeed, it was surely a catalyst for this very development), but its individuality is subtly different,

⁷ Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther – Man between God and the Devil* (*Luther: Mensch zwischen Gott und Teufel*, Berlin, 1982), trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 116–23.

⁸ See James Arne Nestingen, 'Approaching Luther', in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 240–56, esp. pp. 248–9.

perhaps in the way we can intuit that the realization of the inventive implications could have been different, the order of events modified. The music is the realization of a particular and immediate state of affairs rather than the necessary realization of an eternally unique idea (however 'eternal' the musical language may be believed to be). The balance of rationality and particularity in Bach's music was grasped with startling insight by the most incorrigible nominalist of the twentieth century, Theodor Adorno, who noted that Bach was the first composer to crystallize the concept of the rationally constituted musical work, reconciled with the voice of humanity at precisely the historical moment when this latter was being stifled by the newly inaugurated rationalizing trend.⁹ Bach denied the abstract conventions of style in his treatment of each piece as an individual entity, rendering him archaic to many of his contemporaries since he was seemingly unaware of the niceties of taste.

The concept of invention takes us back again to the field of rhetoric. This is the system that has most commonly been associated with Bach's compositional nature over the last century or so, more often than not in the notion that the music comprises various 'figures' pointing to specific meanings or theological undertones (see [Chapter 3](#)). Rhetoric has also been closely related to the music of Bach's time by relating the levels of elaboration (*elaboratio*) and disposition (*dispositio*) to the successive segments of a composition, something that finds intermittent support in German Baroque music theory. Dreyfus, however, taking Mattheson's theory of musical rhetoric (1739) as a starting point, suggests that disposition is really a secondary issue that follows on from the much more essential activity of invention. In other words, too great an attention towards disposition takes us too close to the concerns of later music, in which form becomes a much stronger determining factor. His approach is rather one that places the paradigms of the music (akin to the table that outlines the grammatical inflections of a noun or verb, where we can see all the possibilities simultaneously) above its syntagmatic result (the stringing of these inflections together in a particular sequence). The success of this dynamic approach to invention lies in the way it shows

⁹ Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention*, pp. 221–2; Theodor W. Adorno, 'Bach Defended against His Devotees', in *Prisms (Prismen)*, Frankfurt am Main, 1967), trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 133–46, esp. p. 139; see p. 41. Daniel Chua locates the beginnings of particularity in music in Vincenzo Galilei's observations on the contingencies of tuning, which lay in the variable dimensions and materials of instruments, and thus yielded only inexact ratios; Daniel K. L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 18–19.

how a historically unassailable factor in the general education of Bach's time – rhetoric – could have been engaged by the creative intellect in a way that does not merely reduce to formula. As Bach's famous title page to the 'Inventions and Sinfonias' implies, the levels of elaboration, disposition and performance seem to follow directly from the art of having good inventions; 'by crafting a workable idea, one unlocks the door to a complete musical work'.¹⁰ This approach also shows how processes that could otherwise be described as archetypally formal do in fact embody a human, intentional stance. The implications of 'good inventions' provide only the starting point for the music, and new levels of invention are engaged as the limits and flaws of the primary inventions are exposed.

One aspect of Bach's music to which Dreyfus frequently alludes is the way the composer writes 'against the grain' of the generic and stylistic categories of his age. The implications of this epithet coined by Roland Barthes perhaps go even further than Dreyfus is prepared to take them. For it is surely the case that this element of Bach's music somehow persists even if we know little of the historical context that provided the grain against which he worked. In other words, might it be that the music continues to present something of the stylistic norms, together with Bach's individual reworking of these, in the way it is written and continues to sound? This would suggest a curious sense of order and subversion, both somehow working simultaneously. Such a quality would go beyond the traditional bounds of rhetoric – that which renders an idea full, convincing and persuasive – and towards something that is more dynamic and unpredictable, namely, a dialectic. Such a model, if I can develop it, might help to explain why this sort of music can endure in so many later contexts: it is not so much a matter of an authentic content that is realized afresh in every age, but more a particular dynamic that is always already active whenever the music is performed. This dialectical nature can therefore become engaged by a broad range of different cultural presuppositions and can, in turn, serve to inflect these. Of course, I am still talking about a cultural particular here, not something that would necessarily work for all ages and all peoples: namely, the broad historical category of modernity.

The idea of pitting a dialectical model against a rhetorical one is hardly new: in *Gorgias*, Plato's Socrates seems to suggest that dialectical art is superior to the rhetorical, although he is far clearer in outlining the

¹⁰ Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention*, p. 2.

shortcomings of rhetoric than he is the advantages of dialectic. But perhaps this is itself telling: dialectic is exemplified in the very process of his argument and the way it continually opens up new issues and possibilities. For Socrates, rhetoric is good only for persuading an audience, not about matters of knowledge, but rather about matters of belief without knowledge; the orator does not impart true knowledge of the just and unjust but merely 'creates belief' about these.¹¹ Rhetoric is an experience (i.e. sensation) masquerading as justice, not a true art; it merely produces a sort of delight and gratification, and, together with cookery, attire and sophistry, comes under the genre of flattery.¹² Socrates is rather more generous about rhetoric in *Phaedrus*, but only when it is supported by dialectic, the latter here defined as the ability to divide matters according to their natural formation, a sort of analytical stance that leads both speaker and listener towards the truth.¹³ Perhaps his most productive description of the dialectician is as one who intuits a suitably congenial recipient and who, with true knowledge, implants words 'which are able to help themselves and him who planted them . . . [and] have in them a seed which others brought up in different soils render immortal, making the possessors of it happy to the utmost extent of human happiness'.¹⁴ This gives the impression of a sort of text that somehow takes on a life of its own and continues to edify those who come after, even with very different backgrounds.

Plato's comparison of the two arts has been intensively developed in Stanley Fish's study of seventeenth-century English literature, *Self-consuming Artifacts*. Fish defines rhetoric as the art which embellishes and amplifies the opinions and outlooks an audience already holds, while dialectical presentation is much more disturbing, designed to bring about a change in the listener and to question all the beliefs and assumptions one might bring to the event. If, following Plato, rhetoric is essentially a form of flattery, dialectics is more likely to be humiliating, the 'good physician' who practises it telling his patients what at the outset they do not necessarily want to hear.¹⁵ By forcing the reader or listener to abandon

¹¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), p. 256.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), pp. 134–5, 138.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 139–40.

¹⁵ Stanley E. Fish, *Self-consuming Artifacts – The Experience of Seventeenth-century Literature* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 2–3.

his or her former self, the dialectical work ‘uses itself up’ in the process of reading: any truth it has lies in its effects, what it points towards, rather than what inheres in its own constitution as a totality. In other words, however much the dialectical work might be analysed as an autonomous artefact, the effect in the reader is what really counts. Running directly in the face of the New Critics’ *affective fallacy* (by which the results of a work are never to be confused with the ‘work itself’), Fish suggests that in dialectical productions it is precisely the results – and particularly their open-endedness – that count most. Indeed, such a work is better to be judged as a sort of event than as a fixed artefact.

Fish relates the rhetorical mode in the seventeenth century to the Puritan sermon, which is self-glorifying in its appearance of self-effacement: references backwards and forwards, and strategic repetitions all serve to reinforce a specific point; the systematic outlining of topics points precisely to what is to come. Even similes have a definite purpose, exemplifying the argument at hand but doing nothing more; meanings of words become ever more firmly fixed, never changed, in the course of the sermon. In short, the preacher establishes a consistent sense of control, which the listener assimilates in the process of reading.¹⁶ Fish contrasts this approach with the spiritual writings of Donne, Herbert and Bunyan: here there is a sense that specific effects subvert as much as confirm expectations; while individual sections might seem complete in themselves, they unexpectedly prove to be part of a broader point that leads us in a different direction. An ‘incessant motion’ blurs the very distinctions that it itself momentarily establishes.¹⁷

Something of the dialectical character, then, might underlie the active, dynamic, aspect that I am trying to outline in Bach’s compositional style. After all, this stance is inherent in the Lutheran theological context, with its emphasis on the interaction of law and Gospel (and played out time and again in the texts of Bach’s cantatas). This is not to say that rhetorical methods of approaching this music are thereby to be rendered redundant. Indeed, if Plato’s Socrates suggests that rhetoric does not impart knowledge, such as that of mathematics or medicine, but rather matters of belief without knowledge, precisely the same could be said about music (of whose complex development Plato was so famously distrustful). This use of rhetorical means is surely also one of the ways in which musical and religious thought so easily go together (or even begin to rival one

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 70–4. ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

another). While music does not impart knowledge (and, least of all, 'truth') in the way that a verbal discourse might do, it is entirely plausible to allow that it might help to 'create belief', something that must surely have been part of Bach's purpose in writing church music. From the point of view of an art that establishes an idea and reinforces it through repetition and variation – while at the same time affecting the mood of the listener – one might well surmise that music replicates the psychological structure that rhetoricians have always used. The Pietist antipathy towards complex music is telling too: music was simply too powerful yet too unspecific to be associated with spiritual truths. But Pietist preachers themselves were sometimes condemned for the fact that, in their hands, the devices of rhetoric were so easily transformed into a coercive power, by creating illusory or sophistic logic, or employing figural language that ignited the passions and imagination.¹⁸ Perhaps, then, a union between Pietism and complex music would always be thwarted by the taboo against incest.

If something of the rhetorical impulse underlines any music whatsoever, it is clear that this is an element that Bach developed in extraordinary ways, as Dreyfus and others have suggested. However, I would suggest that the dialectical attitude is also at work, particularly in the way the music implies an effect in time. In other words, this is perhaps a way of rehabilitating the order and placing of events in this music in a way that does not merely return us to the priority of *dispositio*, the sort of fixed-forms model that Dreyfus's emphasis on the dynamic impetus of invention has helped to replace. By adding the notion of dialectic to that of rhetorically derived invention, we might be able to understand how the experience of an 'implied listener' could be constituted. Bach's music does not necessarily lead to a sense of 'resolution' in the way that the dialectical method of sonata form was later to imply, but it perhaps gives us a feeling of change within a soundworld that is still wedded to the sense of a broader, consistent reality. This is a sort of music that welcomes – even creates – belief, even if it cannot on its own determine what sort of belief this should be.

My examination of Bach's inventive attitude in the Passions falls into two areas, which parallel the contrast between rhetoric and dialectic: music that is primarily monist (in which all the factors conspire to reinforce one central idea or principle) and that which might show dualist tendencies (in which there might be two, contrasting, musical elements).

¹⁸ Lawrence E. Klein and Anthony J. La Volpa (eds.), *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650–1850* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1998), pp. 98–9.

Superficially, the monist examples might be categorized as ‘pre-modern’ in outlook (reiterations of ‘the same’, the unchanging essence of things) while the dualist are more ‘modern’ (pointing towards the infinite division of elements, separate spheres of musical expression and style, even a sense of alienation). But all these elements, all too facilely falling into binaries – rhetoric and dialectic, monism and dualism, pre-modern and modern – are to some degree interchangeable, interpenetrating and mutually reinforcing. When, in the following, I suggest that Bach did this or that, I am not of course claiming to replicate the actual sequence of his thoughts, but rather the way the music seems to evoke the sense of a creative persona who weighs up several inventive factors, with an ear to how these will sound in the experience of live performance.

Discovering ‘the same’ – the fugal movements

The most obvious area in which music of Bach’s time could play on the sense of ‘sameness’ is that which possesses the longest genealogy, stretching back into the imitative conventions of Renaissance polyphony. Bach’s movements that are fugues (or are at least fugal in style) will tend to present a comprehensive exploration of their opening subjects and often too the material that accompanies or follows on from these. There is dramatic potential in the way entries of ‘the same’ are placed, repeated and sometimes delayed, but this is coupled with the sense that Bach’s exploration of the various possibilities is akin to the inflection of a paradigm that stands outside the actual realization of the piece. Because of the different possibilities afforded by each inventive complex, the process of Bach’s fugues beyond their initial, conventional exposition of all the voices is surprisingly unpredictable. As Dreyfus has suggested, this has led to the misunderstanding of fugue as ‘merely’ a texture and not a ‘proper form’; in his formulation it is, rather, a genre – a loose covering practice which brings several implications for style, texture and form.¹⁹

The fugal movements in Bach’s Passions tend to be short and very purposeful since they invariably relate to the utterances of a crowd within a narrative context. They are thus not autonomous, stand-alone pieces like the arias, and the reiteration of the fugal material in all the voices needs to represent individuals who share a particular emotion or opinion. Clearly,

¹⁹ Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention*, pp. 135–41.

though, the time of the utterance is extended well beyond that implied by the rate of flow in the surrounding recitative. It is as if both characters and listeners are exploring a point that could have been presented in an instant, but in such a way that it becomes more explicit and insistent through its extension in time. Fugal elaboration naturally separates the individual voices sequentially, but also shows that they are clearly all of one mind.

These points are demonstrated particularly well in the chorus from the John Passion 'Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen', 27b, where the soldiers, noticing the seamlessness of Jesus' coat, ask for it not to be cut up but rather kept in one piece and disposed of by lottery. We might imagine that Bach considered fugal style particularly appropriate for representing something that is 'all of one piece', all its threads continuously connecting to one another to make a seamless whole. Having made this decision, he could then have considered which individual words might receive a pictorial treatment: the syncopations for 'zerteilen' clearly 'divide' the beat as a real demonstration of precisely what the soldiers do *not* want to do to the coat; and the *trillo*-style figuration on 'losen' is a passable imitation of the shaking dice (see [Example 5.1](#), bb. 1–6). With these details in mind, Bach seems to have devised a fugal complex where each bar of the subject will harmonize with itself at one, two, three and four bars' distance (provided each successive entry alternates between 'subject' and 'answer', that is, between tonic and dominant forms). This is a simple version of the 'permutation fugue' idea that Bach pursued in some of his earliest fugues, by which there is a sequence of three or more subjects (i.e. a subject and two countersubjects) that are heard in continuous permutation with one another. Here, though, each 'subject' is only one bar long and is thus merely a subset of the full subject. But the aural character of the permutation fugue is retained in the way each bar brings a recognizable shape, derived from the words, which can be heard being passed from one voice to another (similar in effect to a texted canon or round). The way that Bach made the subject (or the sequence of bar-long 'characters') work with itself is eminently simple since all he had to do was make each successive bar (of the six that constitute the subject as a whole) alternate between tonic and dominant harmony (obviously with the proviso that no parallels or other harmonic irregularities should occur between the parts in any one permutation).

Obviously, the point could have been made by merely confining the piece to the single appearance of the subject in each of the four voices, supported by a simple alternation of tonic and dominant harmonies; in

Soprano
 Alto
 Tenor
 Bass
 Continuo

Las - set uns den nicht zer -
 Las - set uns den nicht zer -
 Las - set uns den nicht zer -
 Las - set uns den nicht zer -
 Las - set uns den nicht zer -

6 2 5 1 2
 7 5 6 3 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35

Las - set uns den nicht zer -
 Las - set uns den nicht zer -
 Las - set uns den nicht zer -
 Las - set uns den nicht zer -
 Las - set uns den nicht zer -

6 2 5 1 2
 7 5 6 3 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35

Las - set uns den nicht zer -
 Las - set uns den nicht zer -
 Las - set uns den nicht zer -
 Las - set uns den nicht zer -
 Las - set uns den nicht zer -

6 2 5 1 2
 7 5 6 3 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35

Example 5.1 John Passion, chorus 'Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen', 27b

12

tei - - - - - len, son - dern dar - um lo - - - - - sen, wes er

- - - - - len, son - dern dar - um lo - - - - - sen, wes er sein soll,

lo - - - - - sen, wes er sein soll, las - set uns den nicht zer -

wes er sein soll,

7 8 6 6 6 6 6 5

16

sein soll, las - set uns den nicht zer - tei - - - - - len, son - dern dar - um

las - set uns den nicht zer - tei - - - - - len, son - dern dar - um lo - - - - - sen,

tei - - - - - len, son - dern dar - um lo - - - - - sen, wes er

las - set uns den nicht zer - tei - - - - -

6 2 6 2 8 2 8

20

lo - - - - - sen, wes er sein soll, wes, wes er sein

wes er sein soll, las - set uns den nicht zer - tei - len, son - dern dar - um lo - sen, wes er

sein soll, las - set uns den nicht zer - tei - len, son - dern dar - um lo - sen, wes er sein

- - - - - len, son - dern dar - um lo - - - - - sen, wes, wes, wes er sein

2 8 3 6 5 3 8 5

Example 5.1 (cont.)

[illegible]

Example 5.1 (cont.)

36

tei - len, son - dern dar - um lo - sen, wes er sein soll,

nicht zer - tei - len, son - dern dar - um lo - sen, wes er sein soll,

sein soll wes, wes, er sein soll, las - set uns den nicht zer -

wes, wes, wes, er sein soll, las set uns den nicht zer - tei - - - - -

40

las - set uns den nicht zer - tei - - - - - len, son - dern dar - um

las - set uns den nicht zer - tei - - - - - len, son - dern dar - um lo - - - - - sen,

tei - - - - - len, son - dern dar - um lo - - - - - sen, wes er sein

- len, son - dern dar - um lo - - - - - sen, wes er sein soll, las-set uns den nicht zer -

44

lo - - - - - sen, wes er sein soll, las-set uns den nicht zer - tei - - - - -

wes er sein soll, las-set uns den nicht zer - tei - - - - - len, son - dern dar - um

soll, las-set uns den nicht zer - tei - - - - - len, son - dern dar - um lo - - - - - sen

tei - - - - - len, son - dern dar - um lo - - - - - sen, wes er

Example 5.1 (cont.)

The image displays a musical score for a fugue, continuing from Example 5.1. It consists of two systems of music, starting at measures 48 and 52. Each system features five staves: four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and one basso continuo staff. The lyrics are in German, and the music is in a Baroque style, likely from a Bach fugue. The lyrics for the first system (measures 48-51) are: "len, son - dern dar - um lo - - - - sen wes. wes. wes er sein". The lyrics for the second system (measures 52-55) are: "soll, las - set uns den nicht zer - tei - len, son - dern dar - um lo - sen, wes er sein soll." The basso continuo staff includes figured bass notation, such as "6", "5 8", "6 4", "7 5", and "6 5".

Example 5.1 (cont.)

some ways, this is all that there is to ‘know’ about the piece. But it surely benefits from the impact of a longer duration, just as – I might suggest by way of simile – a longer coat without seams is obviously more valuable and impressive than a small piece of woven cloth. So Bach’s task was to work out how the opening complex could be extended in a way that remained equally seamless (or, more accurately, ‘seemingly seamless’). Part of the answer seems to have lain in a quirk in the way the diatonic scale is laid out; for if a subject moves from tonic to dominant (repeatedly in this case), the answer (i.e. the second entry of the fugue), which typically begins on the dominant (in this case, G), will invariably have to be modified if it is going to lead back to the tonic at the same point at which the subject led to the dominant (the so-called ‘tonal answer’). If the scale were to have eight notes rather than seven it would divide symmetrically and the same melody beginning on the dominant would

automatically lead back to the tonic. So, like other composers working in the genre, Bach has to make modifications in the answer (first presented in the tenor): bb. 2–3, leap of a fifth instead of a fourth to render b. 3 back in the tonic, and b. 4, repeated note at the end, likewise to keep b. 5 in the tonic rather than coming out a tone too high. The end of the run also has to be modified, the final descending leap (b. 5) being a sixth rather than an octave (later versions can range between a fifth and an octave). All this is perfectly orthodox fugal practice, which is needed to keep the music in its opening tonal area; otherwise it would spiral upwards in keys *ad infinitum*, going well outside the tonal system as it stood in Bach's time. However, when the next answer is heard (beginning in the soprano, b. 4) Bach allows the melody to continue in b. 6 in line with the contours of the original subject by removing the modification he made in b. 4, consequently moving the tonality up a tone to D minor. Now b. 7 sounds a tone higher than would otherwise have been expected (cf. the tenor in b. 5). In other words, a simple switch in the mechanism generates the potential for a piece that modulates beyond its opening stasis, but without any change to the material that is there already or any violation of the way it 'naturally' (i.e. within the conventions of tonality and harmony) behaves.

Another lead to how the piece could be extended comes from the way Bach fills in the basic I–V motion in the basso continuo with the descending stepwise fourth, c–G, in bb. 3–4. With the switch towards A minor in b. 7 coming fortuitously three bars later, Bach can repeat this descending fourth pattern a tone higher (d–A) thus establishing a sequence which we hear in retrospect as deriving from b. 3. This lands on A in b. 8, which provides the opportunity for exploring the fugal material again, in the relative minor. This 'second exposition' presents exactly the same material as the first (complete with modification of the answer, still in the tenor and soprano parts) but now inflected by mode. So far, with no material beyond the main subject having been introduced (other than in the basso continuo, which is independent of the vocal bass), the music has been extended 'without seam'. The first substantive modification is barely noticeable: at exactly the point where the soprano part turned the modified answer back into the intervals of the subject (bb. 6–7 originally), Bach undertakes a more fundamental modification of the soprano's melisma on 'losen' (bb. 14–15) which sounds more or less as an elaboration rather than alteration of the original pattern. The purpose here is to lead the music back to the tonic and away from the A minor realm, but the join sounds just as seamless as the previous one. Here, then, Bach has worked like the expert tailor who covers up a necessary seam in the garment by

writing a new passage that sounds like something entirely integral to the rest of the threads.

Now, back in the tonic, one might imagine that Bach had run out of options for extending a seamless musical fabric, having presented the full exposition of the voices in both major and relative minor modes. But, in fact, the material allows other forms of variation, such as the potential to introduce the voices in a different order; this is something that is immediately noticeable to the listener who can now hear the 'stitching' going in both directions, as it were. Therefore, b. 15 inaugurates a new exposition, back in C, but beginning with the tenor, moving up through alto and soprano and leaving the bass till last; this means that each voice that has hitherto had the subject now has the answer, and vice versa. Again, something new is achieved with the last entry by mixing up the inflections of subject and answer: the bass begins in the answer position (on g, b. 18) but then drops down a fourth, not a fifth, as if it were the subject; then in b. 19, the intervallic pattern reverts to that of the answer (changes are made in other voices to accommodate these inflections), the net result being that the music modulates towards E minor (b. 21). Here Bach introduces his second fundamental modification, to the shape of the phrase 'wes er sein soll', at the point at which it should appear in the last entry (bass), and now beginning as if in mirror inversion of the pattern established for these words (i.e. a rising – rather than falling – third). Other than these first two notes though (b. 22), the writing is essentially new, the inner parts alluding to the quaver motion opening the theme. In other words, the first strong cadence of the piece, in E minor (bb. 22–4), sounds integral to the fugal complex even though it is new material, another of Bach's 'tailor's illusions'. Moreover, it provides the one thing that the opening fugal complex itself essentially lacks: the sense of a clear-cut ending.

Bringing the bass in last, together with its combination of subject and answer inflections, allows yet another extension of the opening complex, one which would not otherwise have arisen. Originally, the progression from the third to the fourth entry facilitated basso continuo movement of a descending fourth (bb. 3–4, elaborating the simpler progression of c–B in bb. 1–2), which, it will be remembered, set up the sequence that allowed the piece to modulate away from its opening key (bb. 7–10). Now, with the bass voice coming in last, this same descending fourth (bb. 17–18) can be extended much further, allowing sixteen descending steps in the basso continuo (with the necessary octave breaks). In other words, what threatened to be a static piece, comprising repetitions of I–V harmony,

now seems to have gone to the opposite extreme, propelled forward by a continuo line that has the potential to carry on descending for ever. Harmonically speaking, this sets up the circle of fifths by which the first note of every bar (bb. 17–22) is a fourth lower (or fifth higher), an obvious extension of the I–V shuttling of the opening fugal complex.

As if to acknowledge that the harmonic rhythm of the piece has intensified, the next exposition consolidates the two most recent inflections. First, taking the idea of modifying the voice order in the third exposition (which began in b. 15) further, the parts are now all presented in descending order, beginning with the soprano. Second, to repeat, the most recent bass entry (b. 18) began as the answer, but replaced the initial dropping fifth with the subject's dropping fourth. Now the entries *all* have the dropping fifth of the answer but with the second bar in each case resorting to the melodic shape of the subject (with a dropping sixth at the end of the bar). This modification means each successive entry is a fifth lower, consequently breaking out of the traditional fugal alternation of degrees I and V. Finally, this helps consolidate yet another recent development, namely the long descending bass pattern of sixteen steps, which, harmonically speaking, set up the harmonic pattern of a circle of fifths. In this section (bb. 24–34) this pattern is reversed, by which the harmony drops a fifth (or rises a fourth) every bar. This is the circle of fifths in its descending form, as if unwinding the mechanism that the previous section wound up. Moreover, while the previous section was characterized by the descending basso continuo line, this one – after the first six bars (in b. 29, beat 3) – presents an upward rising bass line, with fourteen steps up to b. 34.

If the first circle-of-fifths pattern was six bars long (bb. 17–22) this new one (bb. 24–34) is even longer (more than ten bars), threatening to spin the piece into an even bigger circle. The 'exposition', now modified to generate successive entries a fifth lower, automatically facilitates a further extension of the material, by which the first voice to finish (the soprano, bb. 28–9) can begin a new exposition on the next note in the sequence of descending fifths (*f''* in b. 29). Bach had to take two 'risks' if he was going to capitalize on this opportunity: first, the modification of the end of 'wes er sein soll' in the soprano (b. 28), which sounds like a diminution of the original but is really free material; second, the very close parallel octaves between the soprano and bass from bb. 29–30. The leap of the seventh in the bass voice and the movement of the basso continuo (with a satisfactory leap from the bottom F, so that we hear the B \flat in b. 30 approached from the A rather than directly from the F) help to mitigate what could otherwise be a telltale 'seam'.

This section, with its double exposition, following that from bb. 15–24 (with its strong E minor cadence), ends in much the same way, now in D minor with the last three, cadential, bars essentially free, but building very closely on essential motives from the fugal complex so that we might imagine them as integral to the main material (bb. 36–8). Moreover, with the movement in different parts – what was in the alto and tenor at bb. 22–4 is now in the soprano and alto, and the pattern in soprano and bass is now in the tenor and bass – we sense that the permutation principle is now being applied to this secondary material too. Indeed, through this reuse, it is almost as if this cadential section has become an inventive complex in its own right, complementing the opening material by providing the cadence it had so signally lacked.

What now remains? We have discovered how the fugal material can work both in reverse part order and in a succession of falling fifths. The remainder of the piece restores the voices to their original order (bass first), now in rising fourths (the equivalent of falling fifths), mirroring the vocal sequence of the previous section (from b. 24) and retaining the same harmonic progression of the descending circle of fifths. In exactly the same way, a second exposition is grafted onto the first at exactly the equivalent point to b. 29 (now b. 43). Instead of the rising basso continuo line beginning after six bars, this rising line now begins at the end of the second bar (b. 39), generating 26 upward steps. The C major cadence in bb. 50–2 reworks that of bb. 36–8 but with the materials in soprano and alto, and tenor and bass, exchanged. The last four bars repeat this cadence with the parts yet again shuffled. This double cadence perhaps parallels the idea of the doubled expositions that began in b. 24, and also repeats, side by side, the two main cadences within the centre of the piece (bb. 22–4, 36–8). Again, the effect is to render the cadence, originally secondary to the main fugal complex (in fact, the only ‘secondary material’ in the entire piece), a thematic area in its own right. One rule of thumb in Bach’s construction of this movement (and elsewhere) seems to be to ensure that any significant deviation from, or modification of, the opening state of affairs is at some point reused, as if to give the listener a sense of familiarity and grounding in as many aspects of the music as possible. This is clearly part of the rhetorical nature of the music, by which it sustains the attention and renders its subsidiary points more convincing. However, just as with the essential fugal complex, there is no obvious way of predicting when and how the recurrence will occur.

What we could conclude from this is that Bach tends to turn the necessities of convention (whether of harmony in general or fugal

exposition in particular) to creative use in extending the piece. By shuffling the modifications that the conventions of the tonal answer would traditionally demand, he is able to generate forward harmonic movement that remains integral to the material. Moreover, each inflection brings a new set of possibilities – modulation in different directions, different orders of voices, extension of the simplest harmonic movement – and new configurations that can themselves be repeated and modified. The rhetorical aspect of this music obviously lies in its strong invention (here a fugal complex that offers a number of paradigmatic inflections) but also in the way the presentation is calculated to pique the listener's attention. This is not so much the formulaic *dispositio* that Dreyfus has shown to be less significant for the success of the music, but rather the way the order of events is particular to the inflections of the material, and the way these inform one another. This chorus would have been far less successful had Bach presented his doubled expositions in falling fifths (from b. 24) before having set up the upward-rising circle of fifths in the previous section. Moreover, new formulations of the material, or the added cadences, are always presented at least twice, as if to show that they are not merely random occurrences. These aspects together take us beyond the 'merely' rhetorical towards the sense of dialectic: we could not possibly have predicted from the opening exposition that the piece would end with its doubled expositions, double cadence and rising, 26-step bass line. Yet all these things follow directly from issues inherent in the material as it is first presented: Bach turns the asymmetry of the diatonic system and its concomitant need for tonal answers into the mechanism that generates onward development. One could imagine that, had he chosen, he could have spun the piece out yet further, building more on the implications of the various kinks and paradoxes in the seemingly stable fugal material. But, like Jesus' coat, it has to end somewhere, however skilful the tailoring. Moreover, it is also clear that each thread depends on every other for the overall cohesion of the musical fabric: the chorus would come to pieces if the sections were simply shuffled. When we get to the end of it we have a strong sense of the piece as a process that has run its course rather than as a solid musical object that stands out in rock-like autonomy.

Most of the other fugues in Bach's Passions also play on the way a subject interlocks with itself or its continuations. Most epigrammatic is the 'Laß ihn kreuzigen' fugue in the Matthew Passion (45b and 50b) which, like 'Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen', builds from the bass upwards, with each voice proceeding in turn to two more countersubjects. With virtually no extraneous material, but in the space of a single exposition,

the subject is similarly inflected, with the third entry (alto) beginning (as it should) as the subject but continuing with the intervals of the answer. This directs the tonality towards D minor rather than the E minor to which the first (bass) entry led, so that the fourth entry (soprano) has to be a tone lower, and is presented with the melodic shape of the subject rather than the answer. As if to rectify the rupture in the 'natural' fugal order, the soprano immediately proceeds to a further entry on the note originally expected (e''), which leads the piece to its abrupt imperfect cadence. Here, then, it is as if some of the inflections that Bach worked through in 'Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen' are telescoped into a single exposition, giving the impression of a piece that by rights should have been much longer, the intensification working on the smallest possible scale. By giving the telltale signs of a dialectical musical process, where one modification instigates another, the piece gains in its brutal effect, truncated and tonally ruptured, and so provides the greatest possible contrast with the serene aria that lies between this twofold call for crucifixion ('Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben', 49).

The same sort of premature intensification characterizes the chorus 'Sind Blitze, sind Donner' (27b) where the opening entries are in rising fourths, generating a four-bar harmonic movement in the descending circle of fifths, a sense of constantly shifting tonality that is quite unorthodox for the opening of a fugal piece. Then, reversing the strategy used in 'Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen', the entries come in rising fifths (from b. 86), and now three bars apart rather than four (thus 'winding up' the mechanism towards the central pause in b. 104). All these manipulations, while remaining integral to the potential of the material, are placed in an order that seems beyond the control of the listener's expectations, something like the 'force of nature' that the singers are so desperate to summon up against the violators of Jesus.

The most developed example of the permutation fugue principle is the chorus 'Wir haben ein Gesetz' in the John Passion (21f, and repeated a semitone lower as 'Lasset du diesen los', 23b). Here there is a definite division into subject and two successive countersubjects, dividing the text into three parts: first, 'Wir haben ein Gesetz, und nach dem Gesetz soll er ster-', then the melisma on 'sterben', and finally, 'denn er hat sich selbst zu Gottes Sohn gemacht' (Example 5.2). With three interchangeable lines of music, this fugal complex technically allows six combinations of voices (see Example 5.3). However, with the initial order of voice entry (from the bass upwards), only one ordering of the lines is possible in the first exposition, since the subject will always be at the top, the first countersubject

57

Tenor

Bass

Continuo

Wir ha-ben ein Ge-setz, und

Wir ha-ben ein Ge-setz, und nach dem Ge-setz soll er ster-

61

Wir ha-ben ein Ge-setz und nach dem Ge-setz soll er ster-

nach dem Ge-setz soll er ster-

ben; denn er hat sich selbst zu Got-

ben; denn er hat sich selbst zu Got-tes Sohn ge-macht, zu Got-tes Sohn ge-macht, denn er hat sich selbst

Example 5.2 John Passion, chorus 'Wir haben ein Gesetz', 21f, bb. 57–64

below that and the second in lowest place (ordering E in [Example 5.3](#)). If any of the remaining combinations are to be heard, the ordering of voices needs to be changed, so a second exposition begins in b. 67 in the tenor, followed by bass and soprano. This generates three more combinations, B, A and F. However, not only is there no expected fourth entry (alto), but the final entry for soprano leads only as far as the first countersubject (bb. 73.3–76.1) which is then extended in sequence twice, each step rising a third. In other words, Bach seems to have broken out of the strict ordering of the permutation fugue before all the permutations are exposed and before all the voices have entered for the second time. What is likely here is that he discovered that one of the two remaining combinations, D (with the first countersubject above and the second below the subject), is unsatisfactory since it generates a 6/4 chord on the downbeat of the second bar. The 6/4 is, in fact, also generated by combination E (the first to be heard), which Bach sidestepped by changing the note in the continuo on the downbeat of b. 63 to B \flat ; but perhaps he was unwilling to 'cheat' more than once. Only one possibility therefore remains, C (the first countersubject

The image displays four musical staves, each representing a different potential combination of the subject (S) and two countersubjects (CS1, CS2) for the chorus 'Wir haben ein Gesetz' by John Passion. The staves are labeled A, B, C, and D. Each staff shows a sequence of notes and rests, with a large 'DropBooks' watermark overlaid across the middle of the page.

Staff A: CS2 (top), CS1 (middle), S (bottom). CS2 and CS1 are in treble clef, S is in bass clef.

Staff B: CS1 (top), CS2 (middle), S (bottom). CS1 and CS2 are in treble clef, S is in bass clef.

Staff C: CS2 (top), S (middle), CS1 (bottom). CS2 and S are in treble clef, CS1 is in bass clef.

Staff D: CS1 (top), S (middle), CS2 (bottom). CS1 and S are in treble clef, CS2 is in bass clef.

Example 5.3 John Passion, chorus 'Wir haben ein Gesetz', 21f, potential combinations of the subject and two countersubjects

below and the second above the subject). The sequence of voices would have enabled this to happen, with the soprano progressing to the second countersubject and the alto finally entering with the subject. But instead, the soprano entry breaks off incomplete and the alto does not enter. One reason for this might be that after the strong articulation of the dominant in b. 71, with the soprano at the highest point in its range, a further entry of the answer would merely repeat this tonal move from tonic to dominant, and

The image displays two systems of musical notation, labeled 'E' and 'F' in square boxes. Each system consists of three staves. In system 'E', the top staff is labeled 'S' (Soprano), the middle staff is labeled 'CS1' (First Countersubject), and the bottom staff is labeled 'CS2' (Second Countersubject). In system 'F', the top staff is labeled 'S', the middle staff is labeled 'CS2', and the bottom staff is labeled 'CS1'. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures (one flat), time signatures, and rhythmic values (quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, rests, and beams). The music is written in a style characteristic of 18th-century Baroque music.

Example 5.3 (cont.)

perhaps render the tonal direction of the piece too static. As if to compensate, the first countersubject, truncated in the soprano, is extended in sequence in the flatward direction, balancing the strong articulation of the dominant in b. 71 (bb. 74.3–80.3). This is accompanied in the bass by a loose sequential development of the first bar or so of the subject, as it fits in with the countersubject. At the last repetition this fragment in the bass is extended to cover all but the first and the last three notes of the subject (bb. 79–80.3), and unexpectedly leads straight into the second countersubject. This relieves any expectations of the second countersubject, which was delayed by the sequential extension of the first, but it also suggests a new way of formatting the material, by tying the subject to the second countersubject in linear sequence, thus missing out the first countersubject. Almost surreptitiously, the ‘missing’ alto entry finally appears, hidden in the middle of b. 82, accompanied by the second countersubject in the soprano, which had been delayed so long in this voice, and leading to a further entry in the soprano itself in b. 84, on the same pitch and two beats early.

We still do not hear the first countersubject in the lower position at this point, however. Perhaps Bach felt he had exhausted its potential in the previous sequential section, or felt its strong modulatory character to be inappropriate towards the end of the piece. It is as if he had compensated for the missing vertical combination through the linear development of the components that would have been used for that vertical combination. Here, then, we get a sense of him beginning to ‘improvise’ as soon as the

Soprano

Kreu - - - - - zi - - - ge, kreu - zi - ge,

Alto

Kreu - - - - - zi - - - ge, kreu - zi - ge,

ge, kreu - zi - ge, kreu - zi - ge, kreu - zi - ge, kreu - zi - ge,

Example 5.4 John Passion, chorus 'Kreuzige', 21d, subject and countersubject

possibilities of the material begin to run out by the middle of b. 74, maintaining the impression of purpose and order by sequence, and by the delay of the second countersubject and the missing alto entry. Imperfect though the result necessarily has to be, we come away with the impression of a fugal complex that has been intensively researched, and a sense that, with our sense of expectation for the final entry, the remaining fragments have been developed. This music is ideal for setting the text of a group of elders who are concerned with following a law. As Bach's setting shows, the law is consistent as far as it goes, but brings its own flaws and cannot be equally well applied in every context; a degree of improvisation and elaboration is required to render it into a convincing application.

The sense of exhausting the possibilities of the material is also central to the remaining two fugues of the John Passion. That for 'Kreuzige' (21d and 23d 'Weg, weg mit dem' leading back into the 'Kreuzige' music) is striking for the way the fugal processes are used as a pretext for creating as much crosswise dissonance as possible. Superficially, it sounds as though all of the first entries use the same line, displaced by varying distances and intervals. In other words, it builds on the concept of a 'stretto' fugue, where the subject works with itself at different intervals of time and pitch. However, the line presented in the second and fourth entries (alto and bass) is different in a number of ways: its second note is only one beat long instead of two, and this is followed by a leap of a fourth (not a step down); thereafter it follows the same contours as the subject (as if starting on the latter's second note) including its closing dactylic pattern (Example 5.4). In other words, Bach has actually created a fugal complex with two versions of the subject that sound very similar but which through their difference permit a broader range of possibilities. So, from one point of

view, Bach has 'cheated' to make the piece sound like a pure stretto fugue, in another sense he has opened up a broader range of possibilities, with the two subjects combining in a variety of ways, distances and inversions. But by b. 40 these possibilities are exhausted, and the remainder of the piece plays on fragments of the subjects, beginning with the dactylic figure and later bringing in just the opening of the subject in voices doubled in thirds or sixths (b. 46), then the same pattern with these doubled voices reversed (b. 48). In short, half the piece (following b. 40) is essentially a sham in terms of fugal procedure, the fragments of the subjects developed like the Cheshire Cat's smile, in a vindictive improvisation that lasts rather longer than it decently ought.

'Wäre dieser nicht ein Übeltäter' (16b, and, as 'Wir dürfen niemand töten', 16d) likewise splits into two halves. The first half, to the text 'Wäre dieser nicht ein Übeltäter', is a stretto fugue, by which the subject combines with itself at a variety of distances, so creating an agonizing array of chromatic combinations. The theme, in its subject or answer form, follows itself at the distance of 2, 4, 6 and 8 beats, providing Bach with the potential for an extensive exposition. However, some iterations of the subject come with an extension in descending, partly chromatic motion, giving a sense of the subject working in inversion and adding to the dissonance. But this is essentially improvised, gratuitous dissonance that sounds as though it derives directly from the inescapable fugal process. With the second half of the text, 'wir hätten dir ihn nicht überantwortet', the writing is essentially free, with periodic reiterations of the subject (to the original text) in individual voices, but shorn of anything but sham stretto (e.g. bb. 28–30). It is almost as if certain voices in the crowd are speaking behind the others, still on the first half of the sentence; but the musical integration this gives contributes to the crowd's sense of common purpose. In the second chorus, 'Wir dürfen niemand töten', 16d, the text does not contain a second clause, so that after the fugal section proper the music finishes much sooner, with the circle-of-fifths sequence adapted from the 'Jesum von Nazareth' choruses in Part 1 of the Passion (see p. 166).

In all, this study of Bach's Passion fugues suggests that in each case he set out to devise a body of fugal material that is both appropriate to the text and which also generates a number of possibilities for extension. However, in some cases, these possibilities become exhausted after a while and the remainder of the fugue can either build on what might be lacking or insufficient in the material as it stands, or it can develop figures and phrases in a rhetorical way that underlines the vindictiveness of the crowd. Also striking is the way Bach seems quite prepared to add 'sham' fugal

procedures to create more dissonance between the voices. One might also imagine that these help to create the notion of a group of people who pretend to follow details in their laws that do not really exist. The cliché that Bach is a composer who binds himself tightly to contrapuntal rules is not thereby dispelled, but what is particularly striking is the way he engages this discipline, almost against itself, to develop the materials and deviate from them in unusual ways. He therefore creates a remarkable degree of particularity within what he probably assumed to be a universal procedure.

Arias and choruses developing ‘the same’

If fugal procedure is something that Bach appropriated from his earliest models, the ritornello procedure in arias and some choruses shows his engagement with a much more recent development within Italianate concerto writing. The mentality though is much the same: the implications of the ritornello in its most ideal form (not necessarily the first ritornello to be heard) inform much of the material of the piece, in its absences as much as its presences, and in its shortcomings as much as in its advantages. As Dreyfus suggests, the inflections of this basic paradigm are more essential than the actual order of events. He focuses on that aria in the Passions which most strictly confines itself to repetitions and inflections of the opening ritornello, ‘Ach, mein Sinn’ from the John Passion, 13. Here the opening ritornello conveniently segments into the three sections that Dreyfus borrows from Wilhelm Fischer, namely ‘Vordersatz’ (opening statement), ‘Fortspinnung’ (sequential development, literally, ‘spinning forth’), and ‘Epilog’ (closing phrase). Although in some cases there is less obvious a junction between Fortspinnung and Epilog, the way Bach segments the material later in the piece automatically defines where the divisions come. In this aria, Dreyfus suggests that only the first strophe of text influenced the way Bach devised the opening material, and that after this point the singer is more or less left to fend for himself (see also my analysis of the vocal part on p. 81). The relentlessness that makes the singer’s plight so striking lies in the fact that virtually all the musical material surrounding him is directly derived from the ritornello, so there is seemingly no escape from the determinism of the music. As Dreyfus shows, what makes the ritornello material here so susceptible to almost constant repetition is the fact that its segmentation allows several orderings of the material and most of it can also be modally inflected; only

the Epilog sounds inappropriate in the major mode, creating too tranquil a mood and too definite a sense of closure.²⁰

Given that this text is most unusual in being continuous, with no return to the opening lines, the normal procedure of ending with a closing instrumental ritornello would have given the piece a roundedness that it did not warrant. Instead, the last lines of the vocal part are built into a surreptitious repeat of the entire ritornello (bb. 74–89), which is followed by a three-bar closing gesture in the orchestra. This is itself a repetition of the only gesture not presented in the opening ritornello, one that was introduced directly after the first vocal entry (bb. 26–8). Thus, what originally sounded like the only ‘spare’ bit of musical material in the piece eventually serves to finish the aria, as a secondary Epilog to substitute for the missing final ritornello. This is another example of Bach’s tendency to repeat significant secondary gestures, suggesting an antipathy towards wastage and perhaps an anticipation of the listener’s expectations. As in the cadential sections of the fugue ‘Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen’, this secondary Epilog becomes integral to the material of the piece through its very reuse.

While ‘Ach, mein Sinn’ seems to present a classic case of Bach deriving virtually all the material from one source, in reality this degree of economy is exceptional and Bach will normally provide much material that contrasts with that of the ritornello (equivalent to the episodic material of concerto composition). This can develop or extend the ritornello material, sometimes even compensating for a lack or imbalance. Generally, if a ritornello is particularly rich in its material and range of events, it will tend to provide more of the substance of the piece. In ‘Ach windet euch’ from the 1725 version of the John Passion, 19ii, most of the A section of the aria comes directly out of the ritornello and the only obviously contrasting episodes are in the B section, which is still strongly modelled on ritornello materials. In ‘Ich will bei meinem Jesu wachen’ in the Matthew Passion, 20, most of the choir 1 material (i.e. that for the tenor and oboe obbligato) is based on repetitions or inflections of the ritornello, with only one central episode based more freely around motives from the ritornello (bb. 35–47). In this movement the ubiquity of the ritornello material serves as a foil to the much more flexible development of the second choir’s interjections (see p. 285).

Perhaps the most obvious reason for modifying ritornello material lies in some sense of incompleteness in the opening ritornello. This is

²⁰ Laurence Dreyfus, ‘Bachian Poetics in the St John Passion’ (forthcoming article).

particularly the case when its ending is 'open' (i.e. ending on the dominant rather than the tonic, so that the first vocal entry effects a return to the tonic). Consequently, much of the remainder of the aria (or at least its A section, if it is in a strict da capo form) can work rather like a search for the matching ritornello phrase that provides the necessary closure. In 'Ich will dir mein Herze schenken', MP 13, the first vocal entry repeats the open ritornello (bb. 7–12) and the remainder of its part (bb. 13–24) provides the closed, consequent phrase. In this respect, the A section behaves rather like a binary-form dance, with its own open a-section (bb. 1–6, then repeated with the voice 'built-in') and its own 'consequent' b-section of twice the length. Moreover, this contains an embedded return of the ritornello material (b. 21 onwards being modelled on the ritornello from b. 3); it therefore comes close to the 'rounded binary' dance form, where something from the opening section is engineered to return towards the end. This join is rendered even more subtle by the fact that the vocal line's tied notes at the end of b. 20 and b. 21 actually mirror the original bass line at this point, therefore creating a sort of inversion. This leads to the expected 'closed' ending (with a modification in the middle of b. 23), which is then reused in the final instrumental ritornello.

Technically, it might be possible to say that the 'true' ritornello lying behind this piece comprises the first six bars (i.e. the ritornello with its open ending) and the last six bars of the A section (the ritornello with closed ending), but this would suggest something overly symmetrical and – the last bar and a half excepted – entirely repetitive. Much more satisfactory is the way the closed ending emerges out of the vocal development from bb. 13–24, something that provides contrast through its modifications to both the beginning and ending of the initial ritornello. In other words, the actual progress of the piece is more successful than any ideal paradigm lying behind it, a sort of progress that is set in motion by the incompleteness of the opening ritornello.

This sort of strategy is repeated in 'Gerne will ich mich bequemen', 23, although tailored to different opportunities offered by the ritornello. As in 'Ich will dir mein Herze schenken', the initial ritornello is open (i.e. modulates to the dominant), and the first vocal entry essentially repeats this open strain. But after this point the development is new: first, we hear the first four bars of the instrumental ritornello, starting in D minor, the key to which the open ending led, but this is short-lived and the voice enters again. Nevertheless, we hear the remainder of this curtailed ritornello after the rest of the vocal phrase (bb. 65–72), where it seems to take

over from where it had previously left off. As Karol Berger notes, this is a modification of the convention by which, in orthodox da capo arias, a full ritornello is placed after the last vocal entry; here it is split on either side of the main body of the vocal part.²¹

However, this adjustment is not as simple as it might first appear: if the D minor ritornello were a literal transposition of the main ritornello, it would not return us to the tonic, but take us even sharper, to A minor. Therefore, Bach makes an adjustment at the end of b. 66, by which what should have been a G♯ in the violins' line is taken down a tone to F♯, so that the section ends satisfactorily in G minor. This alteration is barely noticeable when we hear it in b. 66, since the vocal part has just finished in G minor. However, were we to put this spliced ritornello back together (i.e. bb. 25–8 with bb. 65–72), the wrench back to G minor would sound rather more contrived. In fact, there is only one way to make the ritornello, at least with minimum alteration, reach G minor satisfactorily, and this is to begin it a fifth lower in C minor. And this is precisely what Bach does within the main vocal strain of this section. This begins surreptitiously, following on from a sequence of four-bar patterns based on the opening, the first being the incomplete D minor instrumental ritornello (b. 25), the next two involving the voice, and placed in B♭ and G minor, respectively. But the C minor version beginning in b. 37 is extended to reproduce, in the vocal part, seven bars from the opening. After this, the ritornello is finished in the violin lines, with the voice diverting to free melody. Later the voice seems to return where it left off in b. 43, repeating the same intervals in b. 57, and then providing a new ending phrase in G minor.

The net result is, then, the presentation of several solutions to the open ritornello, heard in alternation with one another: the bisected final instrumental ritornello with its modification to end in G minor (bb. 25–8 plus bb. 65–72); the C minor complete ritornello (bb. 37–48) that correctly modulates back to the tonic but which could not have been heard directly after the initial open ritornello (because that had ended in D minor); and the bisected vocal line (bb. 37–43 plus bb. 57–64), which seems to mirror the bisection of the instrumental ritornello and provides an alternative G minor ending to that of the C minor ritornello. None of these solutions is completely satisfactory on its own, but together they constitute a completion of the opening ritornello (Example 5.5). This is, then, an

²¹ Karol Berger, 'Die beiden Arten von Da-Capo-Arien in der Matthäus-Passion', *BJb* 92 (2006), 127–59; see 129.

23. Aria

Vln I & II

Continuo

25

65

37

Bass solo

II

ger - ne will ich mich be - que - men. Kreuze und Be - cher an - zu - neh - men. trink ich doch dem Hei - land nach.

57

Bass solo

III

will ich ger - ne mich be - que - men. trink ich doch dem Hei - land nach.

Example 5.5 Matthew Passion, aria 'Gerne will ich mich bequemen', 23, initial 'open' ritornello and three solutions to 'closing' it

attempt at the 'best possible' musical world with the material available, even if each component demonstrates some level of incompleteness or imperfection. There is no 'universal' model out of which the aria issues as a by-product; it is rather the result of several simultaneous lines of development and thereby utterly particular.

'Gerne will ich mich bequemen' introduces the notion of using particular segments of the ritornello, namely the opening four bars, repeatedly in sequence (bb. 25–40). The ritornello for 'Erwäge, wie sein blutgefärbter Rücken' in the John Passion, 20, similarly permits reuse of the opening bar in different keys (b. 9 E \flat major, b. 10 C minor). 'Ich folge dir gleichfalls', John Passion 9, is developed partly out of the fact that the ritornello will work in truncated form, with just the Vordersatz and Epilog together and the Fortspinnung omitted. This is demonstrated right at the outset of the vocal part, which repeats the first four bars (Vordersatz) and is followed immediately by an instrumental interlude (bb. 21–4) comprising the last four bars (Epilog). This truncation opens up two possibilities for what might happen later in the piece: the detachable Fortspinnung might itself be given more attention at some point, and the notional gap between

Vordersatz and Epilog could be filled with something else. This latter is indeed what happens next, after the second vocal presentation of the Vordersatz (bb. 24–8). This episode effects the modulation to the dominant with some allusion to the figuration of the missing Fortspinnung in the flutes (bb. 32–9). The A section ends with an instrumental ritornello in F, again missing out the central Fortspinnung section. The B section of this modified da capo aria (i.e. one where the first A section ends in the dominant and where the A' is modified so that it reciprocally modulates back to the tonic) begins in b. 49 as if it were an episode based on the first one (from b. 29). Its first instrumental interlude (bb. 66–78) presents us with the first Fortspinnung since the opening, which proceeds to the Epilog in G minor. Later we hear an entire embedded ritornello in C minor (bb. 88–103).

However, we are still yet to hear the Fortspinnung reused in its original key of Bb: the opening of the modified A section return, like the opening of the vocal part, presents the Vordersatz followed by the Epilog, but at the point where it originally diverted into episodic material, at b. 28, we finally hear the Fortspinnung in its original place and key (b. 128). This time, though, the Epilog is delayed from where it should appear (b. 137), until b. 150. The final instrumental ritornello is again in the truncated form, without the Fortspinnung. This example is different from those that have an 'open' ritornello: while they are built around the search for an adequate sense of closure without ever presenting a completely rounded ritornello, this aria begins with a long, rounded ritornello which is never again heard complete in its original key but which is nevertheless heard as the principal means by which the elaboration of the aria is generated.

Many of these examples have already referred to the surreptitious use of ritornello recurrences, by which segments of the ritornello, sometimes even its opening, are introduced into the music without any obvious articulation. This is done twice in 'Erbarme dich' in the Matthew Passion (39), where it seems to be part of an episode that began only two bars before (bb. 15 and 39). In fact, of the two A sections in this modified da capo form, only two bars of each are not directly taken from the ritornello (bb. 13–14, and bb. 37–8), but these are enough to render the returns of the complete ritornello inconspicuous.

In some cases, the surreptitious ritornello return is combined with a strategy by which the ritornello material has previously been extended or otherwise adapted to accommodate issues of text or affect. We might well be fooled into imagining that the extended version is the actual ritornello, rather than a variation on it, and then we do not immediately notice when

the ritornello itself returns verbatim. This is evident, for instance, in the very opening chorus of the John Passion, where the vocal entry at b. 19 seems to be a repeat of the ritornello. The first two bars are close enough up to b. 20, but bb. 21–3 together constitute an expansion of the original b. 3, presumably in order to give particular stress to the word ‘Herrscher’ (‘Ruler’). The next bar (b. 24) returns to the original b. 4, but the reiteration of the word ‘Herrscher’ again expands the ritornello material (bb. 25–6 being equivalent to the original bb. 5–6) and then bb. 28–31 return to the framework of bb. 7–10. The music leading from here to b. 40 is all essentially episodic, derived in one way or another from motives in the ritornello but never replicating its basic harmonic framework. We hear the opening chorus entries once again in b. 40, as if this expanded version of the ritornello has now become an ‘official’ variant, but we might sense a deviation in b. 44, with what seems like a new lurch towards C minor. In fact, this deviation is actually a splice into the middle of b. 5 of the original ritornello, which forms the harmonic model for the remainder of the A section, so it is actually a return to ‘normality’ rather than a deviation as such. A similar sort of splice is made at the end of the B section, in b. 86, which returns to the middle of b. 10 (now transposed up a fifth, into the dominant). Bach was obviously concerned about the fact that this splice on the downbeat of b. 86 takes us to the middle of the original bar, so he rectified this by making b. 93 twice as long as the original b. 17, beats 3–4. As in his fugal writing, Bach here seems willing to adapt the ritornello material to make it work in its new contexts, deviating or extending it for emphasis. There is also the hint of decoying the listener into imagining that the prominent vocal entries are direct repetitions of the ritornello and then discreetly re-joining the ritornello framework at a later time; the familiar is made to sound unfamiliar and that which deviates from the established pattern begins to sound like the norm. In this way, the music seems to end at the ‘right’ time even if much of the vocal elaboration of the framework is new.

Bach used a strikingly similar strategy in the opening chorus of the Matthew Passion, ‘Kommt, ihr Töchter’, almost as if he transferred his style of thinking from one Passion to the other. The first vocal entries, bb. 17–22, mirror the first five bars of the ritornello, but b. 20 is essentially an insert between the original bb. 3 and 4. This permits a further fugal entry in the soprano part at the end of b. 19. Perhaps Bach made this expansion in order to give a sense of developing the ritornello material further, a sort of rhetorical emphasis highlighting the vocal entry; perhaps he did not even notice the potential for this third entry until he came to write out the

vocal parts. Beyond b. 25, much of the remainder of the movement presents only small parts of the ritornello (e.g. the Fortspinnung passage for the instrumental interlude bb. 38–42, which is taken from the original bb. 6–9, but with an extra G major bar added at the beginning). This is largely to accommodate both the dialogue writing between the choirs and the insertion of the chorale ‘O Lamm Gottes’, neither of which are seeded in the ritornello material. But, just as in the case of the opening chorus of the John Passion, the movement ends with a typical splice into the opening ritornello, at b. 80 (back to b. 7), which constitutes the most extensive reuse of the ritornello material in the piece.

The concept of expanding elements of the ritornello relates to the obvious rhetorical device of giving emphasis and increased intensity to something that has already been introduced, particularly when the vocal part is added.²² In ‘Blute nur, du liebes Herz’ from the Matthew Passion (8), the vocal part of the A section essentially follows the contours of one complete ritornello, but embellishes it in several ways, first by presenting an inverted version of the bass line in bb. 13–14, then by adding a four-bar sequence before returning to the point where the ritornello left off (b. 19). In the aria urging the believer to hurry to Golgatha in the John Passion, 24, ‘Eilt, ihr angefochtenen Seelen’, the entry of the bass immediately doubles the length of the first two bars of the ritornello, of which only the Vordersatz is initially used. The next full entry of the ritornello takes this sense of addition even further, the first two bars becoming three (bb. 46–8) and the chorus interjections of ‘wohin?’ being added to the remainder of the Vordersatz and Fortspinnung. Then the original Epilog is rewritten with a pause on the final ‘wohin?’ leading to an alternative final cadence (bb. 64–5). As Dreyfus suggests, the singers never have the ‘real’ ending which the orchestra provides, as if to suggest that they never really reach Golgatha, but merely come to understand the importance of getting there. Moreover, this pattern of choral interjection and alternative cadence is repeated twice more in the piece, suggesting that nothing actually changes as such, rather that the contemplative aspects of the text are deepened, first through expansion and then through repetition of ‘the same’.²³

One further thing to add to Dreyfus’s observations is the fact that this movement contains one of the largest literal recurrences in all the non-da-capo pieces in Bach’s Passions. The third recurrence of the ‘wohin?’

²² For the Erasmian approach to rhetoric, see Bettina Varwig, ‘One More Time: J. S. Bach and Seventeenth-century Traditions of Rhetoric’, in *Eighteenth-century Music* 5/1 (2008), 179–208.

²³ Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention*, pp. 94–101.

passage is part of a much larger direct reuse of both episodic and ritornello material, stretching from b. 133 to b. 175; this duplicates, transposed up a fourth, the entire passage from bb. 23–65, beginning from the seventh bar of the bass's first entry. What was originally a complete but expanded ritornello in D minor beginning at b. 46, now comes out in the tonic at b. 165. This is perhaps the closest a through-composed movement comes to the notion of recursive time, a sort of recurrence that is at first difficult to notice (the splice at b. 133 comes in mid-phrase) but where the reuse of episodic material in addition to the expanded ritornello renders the sense of recurrence almost uncanny. The rhetorical process of confirming and reaffirming what we know already therefore begins to take on a more subtle character. While, in one sense, the return to G minor for this second occurrence implies a sense of closure, the doubled cadence leaves things open, a sort of dialectic with no synthesis implied.

The notion of having different cadences for vocal and instrumental lines is by no means uncommon, but is most striking when, as in this aria, the vocal sections are strongly modelled on the ritornello. In 'Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben' in the Matthew Passion (49) the vocal sections are often based on an elaboration of the ritornello played in the instruments, but with the soprano remaining independent of the ritornello lines, including cadences, for much of the time. This relates to the preponderance of vocal lines in the Matthew Passion that deviate from the instrumental material, as I have observed in [Chapter 1](#) (see pp. 83–92), but also substantiates the notion of a dialectic that is played out simultaneously rather than merely in linear time.

I have already mentioned the way in which Bach can give his music a sense of rhetorical reinforcement by treating secondary elements as if they were part of the core ritornello material (as I suggested initially, for the cadences in the chorus 'Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen': see p. 261). The large-scale repetition of a whole section in 'Eilt, ihr angefochtenen Seelen' is perhaps the extreme case of his tendency to 'double' secondary elements, often more literally than in the case of ritornello recurrences. Sometimes such repetitions might take on a more dialectical nature. In 'Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder' from the Matthew Passion (42), Picander's text is unusually short, with only four lines and the first repeated at the end. It is not unlike the text for 'Blute nur, du liebes Herz' (8), where the first line is one syllable shorter than the eight for 'Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder', but where there are four more lines of text, which Bach treats as the B section of a full da capo form. In 'Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder' Bach decides to set the first line (twice) to the Vordersatz of the ritornello, but

the remaining lines he sets immediately to new material, derived from the original Fortspinnung sequence, but only quoting it directly in two bars (bb. 21–2).²⁴ It is this section that is reused (with some tonal and harmonic modifications and a two-bar abbreviation) as what sounds like the B section of this modified da capo form (bb. 33–40). Next follows the gesture of a da capo (only the first two bars of the ritornello) followed by the opening text sung to a new sequence of scales that is in fact the first new material since the ‘secondary ritornello’, which first began in b. 17 (see p. 90 for a consideration of this in terms of the development of subjectivity). Even this new material is loosely based on the same sort of figuration as the ‘secondary ritornello’ (at least in the string parts), but it is now sung to the first line of the text rather than the second. Moreover, it lasts six bars rather than the four of bb. 17–20, before diverting into the two bars taken from the actual ritornello (that were reused at bb. 21–2). Now, of course, this is sung to a repetition of the first line of text (‘Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder’) rather than the second line it has had so far (‘seht, das Geld, den Mörderlohn’). The cadence (bb. 51–3) is similar in trajectory to the previous two vocal cadences, but it is essentially different in melodic line. In other words, as I observed in [Chapter 1](#), this truncated da capo contains the largest amount of new material in the piece, as if to compensate for the fact that virtually all the ‘B section’ material is a reuse of the second half of the original A section. In all, this aria gives the impression of the utmost economy in its recycling of both ritornello and ‘secondary ritornello’ elements. On the other hand, it suggests something much less stable in its subversion of the usual discreteness of A and B sections and in the way, at the end, the first line of text is given to material that was originally used for the second line (bb. 49–50). As in the changing permutations in fugal movements, the new inflections give us a sense of openness and change within a world in which everything still seems to remain the same.

Bach had done an even more subtle version of the same thing in the first aria of the John Passion, ‘Von den Strikken’ (7), where a passage in the B section (bb. 55–66, over half of the vocal material in the B section), is remodelled in the modified A section return (from b. 85), now with the first line of text (likewise beginning in D minor, but ending in B \flat major rather than G minor). Here the interplay of sameness and difference is particularly involved since the initial ritornello for this aria is based on a repeating bass pattern that has the character of an ostinato, one that can be

²⁴ See Berger, ‘Die beiden Arten’, p. 133, for the observation that the entire text is set in the A section of the music.

reused in countless ways without necessarily repeating the ritornello directly. The passage beginning in b. 55 represents the largest sequential extension of this pattern in the piece, so it takes on a sort of developmental character that is reused in the modified A section. A less formal, but expressively very striking reuse of material from the B section also occurs in the last aria of the John Passion, 'Zerfließe, mein Herze' (35), where the pattern of descending anapaests first used briefly in the voice at b. 79 is expanded to three bars in the closing phrase of the aria (bb. 119–21).

One final category to consider comprises a small number of arias where we experience a sense of overall cohesion and unification of elements, but where the ritornello is barely used at all in any direct sense within the vocal sections. It is almost as if Bach engages his inclination to generate as much variety as possible from the ritornello material in reverse: can using the ritornello as little as possible create the impression of sameness? This is particularly the case in movements that have a strong ostinato character that brings with it a sense of continual repetition. In 'Mein teurer Heiland' (JP 32), the opening ostinato begins with an opening repetition that can be reused in any number of ways, but its closing gesture (initially modulating to the dominant) reappears remarkably infrequently. It can be heard relatively regularly near the beginning, for the two instrumental interludes at bb. 7–9 and bb. 12–14, and once again when accompanying the singer in E minor, but with the cadence averted (bb. 15–17). But elsewhere it is generally avoided, appearing in the vocal part only in the last phrase (bb. 41–3) and now with an ending in D major to provide closure for the modulating opening phrase. The deferral of the closed ending in the vocal part is one of the things that sustains our attention in a movement that otherwise seems superficially so repetitive.

'Geduld! Wenn mich falsche Zungen stechen' in the Matthew Passion (35) is built on a longer and more rounded ostinato, which is obligingly twice repeated for the first vocal entries, but which is never heard again complete until the end. The instrumental interludes refer to parts of it, but never in the same way (that in bb. 29–32, in E minor, being the closest to a complete transposition). But, in the remainder of the vocal sections, it is remarkable how little of the ritornello is used in any direct way. Of all the arias, then, this one that sounds the most repetitive is in fact the one that comes closest to a sort of free improvisation based on fragments of the ostinato.

'Komm, süßes Kreuz' (57) similarly contains surprisingly little direct ritornello material. The first interlude, in A minor, bb. 19–23, presents the first two bars of the opening and then a condensed version of the rest, and the second (in B \flat major, bb. 34–9) begins with the same harmonic pattern as the original Fortspinnung (b. 3) but thereafter diverts into free variation.

Even the closing strain for viola da gamba is much shorter than the opening strain, and it also provides the closed ending that the opening strain of the initial ritornello lacks. In the vocal sections, only the first two bars of the ritornello are used, and everything else is independent of direct ritornello material. As if to compensate, the return of the A section in this modified da capo form is, in its entirety, a reuse of the opening A, but transposed down a fifth, so that the original modulation from D minor to A minor returns the music from G minor to D minor (this large-scale reuse of material rivals that of 'Eilt, ihr angefochtenen Seelen' in the John Passion, 24, but without the equivalent engagement of ritornello segments). In other words, the greatest amount of reuse in this aria is of the non-ritornello material (i.e. 'episode'), framed by the ritornello in its open and closed forms.

While all the examples so far have ranged from those that adhere closely to the opening fugal complex or ritornello to those that seem to avoid it to the greatest feasible degree, they all have in common the sense of a unification of material. Even if the music diverts from the primary inventive material, these diversions seem to be of a piece with that material or perhaps capitalize on the lack or potential it affords. Sometimes the 'same' is actually made to sound new, or the different is unified in such a way that it sounds the 'same', so that the music is seldom completely predictable. The sense of rhetorical elaboration and confirmation of that which is already at hand gains a dialectical energy. Bach's pursuit of the idea that each invention should imply a piece of unified substance brings consequences that could not have been predicted, so that what seems to be an enclosed world of predetermined connections can in fact imply an infinitude of possibilities.

My final study will be of a specific class of movements that much more boldly present a contrast of disparate elements. This is a sort of dualism that has much in common with the rather more 'modern' musical aesthetic of the so-called Classical era, by which contrasting, even opposing, elements are essential to the dynamic of the style. In Bach's case though, the sort of synthesis that 'sonata form' is often seen to work towards does not necessarily transpire. Indeed, the contrasting elements are sometimes treated as if they already belonged together, exactly in the way Bach's otherwise monist style would imply.

Arias and choruses with dualistic elements

Passions, like any music of their time relating to lamentation or death, will tend to contain pieces with 'dragging' elements, such as repetitive

Example 5.6 John Passion, aria 'Zerfließe, mein Herze', 35, 'static' passage from ritornello, bb. 9–12

figuration, long pedals and throbbing rhythms. The choruses opening both Passions are absolutely typical of this idiom. Although they both contain elements of stasis, the harmonic rhythm is generally fairly constant above the pedals and, indeed, the sounding of dissonance and its resolution is key to their creation of a mood of intense emotion. In the last aria of the John Passion, 'Zerfließe, mein Herze, in Fluten der Zähren' (35), Bach used some of the four-note repetitive figures that he had introduced in the first chorus (whether or not by intention) and this 'Passion figure' is particularly noticeable when it is transferred to the basso continuo line (bb. 9–12). This passage, which comes at the point where we might expect the Fortspinnung in the full ritornello of an aria, is striking for another reason (see Example 5.6): it is harmonically entirely static, a prolongation and elaboration of the dominant chord; the flute and oboe introduce arpeggiated figures for the first time and their parts are marked *staccato* (at least in the last version of this Passion)²⁵ – in direct contrast to most figures up to this point, which have been largely conjunct and slurred. In other words, the passage is strongly contrasted with what stands around it and, more significantly, it could indeed be omitted altogether without disturbing the harmonic shape of the ritornello (b. 8 could lead directly to b. 13 and make a twelve-bar rather than sixteen-bar ritornello). Thus, although it performs the syntactic function of a Fortspinnung, it is entirely contrary to the harmonic shape of a 'regular' Fortspinnung, which is generally the point where the harmony begins to move in a regular, sequential fashion.

The ritornello therefore contains a dualistic element by which a harmonically passive passage with a contrasting motivic style holds up the regular flow of the music. The only element in common with the rest is the

²⁵ See John Butt, *Bach Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 136–7; NBA, vol. II/4, Kritischer Bericht, p. 274. This figure was slurred in pairs in earlier versions of the work.

four-note figure in the bass, which sounds as if it were momentarily stuck in one position. It would be easy to come up with some sort of hermeneutic interpretation in keeping with the text: perhaps it represents the heart, before it is emotionally moved to flow in streams of tears, and represented here in a sort of anxious stasis; perhaps it represents those tears themselves, flowing in the way they do, and viewed objectively, apart from the stream of subjective consciousness. Either way, there is obviously a contrast of 'musical consciousness', a holding up of the regular flow, which could be articulated as the contrast between subject and object. As the first A section proceeds with the vocal entry, the adaptation of ritornello material is relatively orthodox, with the Vordersatz initially used in the tonic and the second vocal entry leading towards a new restatement in the dominant (b. 33). However, at the point where the static Fortspinnung would be expected (b. 41), it is replaced by an analogous passage shuttling between the dominant and the tonic 6/4 chord and with the staccato arpeggio figures in the wind replaced by repeated notes (which are themselves a new addition to the motivic array). In typical rhetorical fashion, this section is expanded by one bar, as is the subsequent closing passage, which brings the vocal part back into the original Epilog at b. 48 (equivalent to b. 14 in the opening ritornello). Given that the static Fortspinnung has not been used in its opening form and the Epilog is substantially modified, the ensuing instrumental interlude can present the original Fortspinnung and Epilog in the dominant without it sounding merely like a repetition of what has just occurred (the return of the staccato articulation also helps underline the contrast here).

So far, then, the static version of the Fortspinnung has been withheld from the vocal part, and this trend continues throughout most of the B section (bb. 59–88). Nevertheless, the new repeated-note figure in the wind, which was first introduced for the substitute Fortspinnung at b. 41, becomes a major topic in the central section. Another, seemingly unexpected, element here is the introduction of pauses for the two repetitions of text 'dein Jesus ist tot', as if the knowledge of Jesus' death has only just sunk in. Perhaps it is only *seemingly* unexpected because the static Fortspinnung has already prepared us for the experience of a cessation of movement; perhaps the absence of the Fortspinnung from the solo part up to this point implies a damming up of whatever emotional state it could be taken to represent. Only with the fourth repetition of the text 'dein Jesus ist tot' does the voice actually coincide for the first time with the original static pattern (bb. 83–6), as if the latter's significance has only now fallen into place. Moreover it is now joined to a new cadence (derived

from the one used for the second repetition of the text in bb. 72–3), more expressively melodic than the instrumental cadence of the Epilog, which the singer impersonated at the end of the A section in bb. 49–50.

The singer coincides with the static Fortspinnung just one more time, in the very last phrase of the vocal part in the modified A section return (bb. 119–22) where it is again tied to the new vocal cadence. The original Epilog, with its instrumental cadence, then completes the piece. Here, then, is yet another example of the development of a vocal cadence that is an alternative to the instrumental cadence, something which occurs elsewhere in Passion arias (see p. 276); it is also another example of the way in which the B section can influence the return of the A material, which would conventionally be uninflected by what happens in the middle. But, given its origins as a completion of the voice's first encounter with the static material, the new vocal cadence represents a much greater sense of change than is the norm for Bach's arias. Obviously, this is balanced by the otherwise clear consistency between the music of the two A sections, but there is also perhaps the feeling that the dualistic element has had some effect in generating a change of state. What that change might be and what it might lead to is nevertheless left entirely open.

Bach used the static idea again, although in a much less conspicuous way, in the next poetic setting, the final chorus of the Passion 'Ruht wohl, ihr heiligen Gebeine' (39), where the harmonic motion is held up on the dominant in bb. 4–6, and then on the tonic for two more bars. Significantly, this passage is omitted from the first vocal entry and brought back only towards the end of the main vocal strain (from b. 39). The two episodes lying between the three reiterations of the main strain, setting the text 'Das Grab, so euch bestimmet ist', take the static idea further with the harmonic rhythm slowed by the movement through different inversions of a constant chord.

There are several things in the John Passion that may have seeded ideas for the Matthew Passion. The aria 'Eilt, ihr angefochtenen Seelen' (24) introduces the concept of a dialogue between vocal forces, here with the bass pitted against a questioning choir comprising soprano, alto and tenor. Then the aria with added chorale 'Mein teurer Heiland', 32, takes the idea of splitting forces further by having the ripieno bass singer take on a solo role in singing the bass line of the chorale, so that a full four-part choir can work in dialogue with the first bass's aria (see p. 201). I would suggest that the static elements that Bach introduced towards the end of the John Passion were also part of the seeding of ideas for the later Passion. Given that the dialogic element of the Matthew Passion is asymmetrical (with

choir 1 having about twice the amount of poetic material as choir 2), the interpolation of shorter, static, elements parallels the role of choir 2, which often expresses a very different character from that of choir 1.

As I have mentioned already, the opening chorus of the Matthew Passion is striking for the heterogeneity of its elements and its construction in what is more like a chain of phrases and sections than is the norm for Bach's paradigmatic, more monist inventions (see p. 102). Looking at it from the point of view of its inventive charge, it is striking that the chorale element is not in any way accommodated by the music of the opening ritornello; indeed, none of its lines fit directly with this material.²⁶ Moreover, the dialogic element is not integral to the basic material of the ritornello until the last three bars, when the orchestra unexpectedly divides into two. In all, it is impossible to derive much of the movement directly from the opening ritornello or even from a sort of 'ideal' ritornello that might be composed of various segments across the movement as a whole. The ritornello and the chorale (and, to a lesser extent, the dialogue itself) are simply elements of non-unified inventive material that are put together sequentially rather than acting as inflections of some prior paradigmatic unity.

The unexpected dialogue between the orchestras at the end of the ritornello has something of the quality of stasis that I noted in 'Zerfließe, mein Herze' (35), although the harmonic rhythm is here more active. But the repetitive nature of the motives that are tossed from one orchestra to the other has very much the same effect of holding up the motion. When the characteristic Neapolitan sixth introduces the cadence in b. 16 there is a feeling of resuming the flow that has momentarily been suspended by the dialogue in bb. 14–15. Something of the shape of the motives in the static interpolation informs the passages where the two choirs work in dialogue, but it is not until the last bars of the piece (with its long splice from the opening ritornello) that we hear the two choirs singing this section, a passage that now sounds like an intense synopsis of the dialogue that colours so much of the rest of the movement.²⁷ In short, the brief interpolation sets up the idea of a duality, both through its antiphonal effects and in its difference from the remainder of the ritornello. But it is not until the very last bars of the piece that this connection with the vocal

²⁶ This is contrary, for instance, to what Bach does in the first chorus of Cantata 78, 'Jesu, der du meine Seele', where he made the 'staggering discovery' that each of the six strains of the chorale tune could be combined with the descending chromatic fourth of the chaconne bass. See Dreyfus, 'Bachian Invention and Its Mechanisms', p. 185.

²⁷ Karol Berger, *Bach's Cycle*, pp. 58–9.

scoring becomes absolutely explicit. Much simpler in this respect is the way the static element of the final chorus 'Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder' (68) corresponds directly with the point at which the two choruses split (bb. 8–10 in the opening instrumental strain, bb. 20–2 when that same music is texted). In the central section, where choir 1 develops new phrases derived from the identical A sections (bb. 49–80), choir 2 retains its role of responding with the dialogue phrase (singing text almost identical to what it had before, 'Ruhet sanfte, ruhet wohl!'), thus holding up the movement between each of the phrases in choir 1.

The connection between duality expressed in musical material and that relating to the dialogic performance forces of this Passion is made absolutely clear by the fact that all the remaining dialogues in the work involve similar sorts of static interpolation that arrest the ordinary flow of the music. Most elaborate and significant of all is the dialogue movement 'Ich will bei meinem Jesu wachen' (20). Here the static element is evident right near the start of the ritornello, bb. 3–5, where, despite a good deal of melodic movement, the harmony is suspended on the dominant for over two bars. The sense of this as an interpolation becomes clearer if we imagine the middle of b. 3 going directly to the middle of b. 5, which would be like an ordinary junction between Vordersatz and a sequential Fortspinnung. The role of this as an interpolation, interrupting the regularity of the ritornello, is concretized as soon as the voices enter, for it is precisely at this spot that choir 2 enters in dialogue with the tenor (bb. 13–15), singing in a soft, evenly paired idiom which contrasts with the much more variegated lines of tenor and oboe (Example 5.7).

Even at this point, it is clear that the interpolated 'static' section is designed to be flexible. Although it mirrors harmonically what happens at this point in the ritornello, its melodic shape is different. The second choir 2 entry at exactly the same juncture in the next reiteration of ritornello material is similar but now with the vocal parts inverted (bb. 19–21), as if to suggest that choir 2 is undergoing its own sort of development independently of what goes on in choir 1 (which tends to adhere much more directly to the ritornello material). This independent nature emerges even more strongly when the same material is processed through the relative major (bb. 27–31); now the interpolation is twice the length and brings its own sense of roundedness, with a new cadential section that is independent of the ritornello's cadence (Example 5.8).

The increasing independence of the two choirs is stressed by the organization of the B section (with its new text 'Meinen Tod büßet seine Seelennot'). Here, for the first time, the tenor sings during the static

20. Aria

Andante

Oboe 1

Continuo

Tenor

Soprano, Alto

Tenor, Bass

Continuo

Ich will bei mei - nem Je - - - su wa - chen.

So schla - fen uns - re Sün - den ein,

Example 5.7 Matthew Passion, aria 'Ich will bei meinem Jesu wachen', 20, opening ritornello, bb. 1–5, and opening vocal section, including first choir 2 interpolation, bb. 11–14

Soprano, Alto

Tenor, Bass

Continuo

so schla - fen uns - re Sün - den ein, so schla - fen uns - re Sün - den ein,

Example 5.8 Matthew Passion, aria 'Ich will bei meinem Jesu wachen', 20, choir 2 interpolation, bb. 27–30

passage, appropriately to the word 'Tod', held to a long note (b. 34). Thereafter his part diverts into sequential elaboration of this passage, the freest section for choir 1 in the aria (b. 47). When choir 2 enters next, it is not in response to the usual opening phrase of the ritornello; indeed the move from B \flat major (choir 1) to the dominant of G minor (choir 2) at

this point (b. 47) brings the sense of an abrupt return to a ritornello segment. But this proves not to be the return to the original function of providing a two-bar response: taking further the idea of rounding off the extended two bars with a cadence (as introduced bb. 27–31), this interpolation becomes a fully rounded section in its own right, with all the characteristics of a new ritornello, a secondary ‘invention’. The rounded version of what was originally a static interpolation becomes a sort of *Vordersatz*, which is then followed by a *Fortspinnung*, complete with walking bass (bb. 51–5); then the paired, repetitive figures return to form the basis of a closing phrase with a cadence echoing that which we first heard at bb. 30–31, but now in the minor mode.

The modified and condensed da capo section presents the tenor and oboe back in their orthodox form, modelled directly on the original ritornello, and choir 2 responds in the way it was originally meant to do (bb. 63–5). Yet one surprise remains: in b. 69, choir 2 enters with a closing phrase that seems to answer all its short interpolations so far (a tonic resolution to a prolonged dominant) as if attempting to round off its own discourse independently of its role in responding to choir 1. But this immediately leads into a reworking of the secondary ‘invention’ that it evolved in the central section, first with a return of the two-bar interpolation in F minor, then with the *Fortspinnung* section and the closing Epilog. Its final cadence is modelled more on that in bb. 49–50, with its characteristic Neapolitan sixth, than the one at bb. 58–9. This means that the four cadences in the second choir sections relate to each other alternately: the first (bb. 30–1, in E \flat major), relates to the third (in G minor, bb. 58–9), and the second (in G minor, bb. 49–51) relates to the fourth in C minor (bb. 79–81). The movement then closes with a complete repeat of the ritornello, as if returning to classic Bachian order.

This movement presents a unique dynamic: the choir 1 sections operate like a typical ritornello movement, with the only significant deviation from ritornello material occurring in the central section (and even this is strongly tethered to sequences taken out of the fundamental material). The final section is typically telescoped, alluding to some of the events in the first section, so that the tenor’s restarting of the ritornello in b. 17 (which nicely overlaps with the *Fortspinnung* of the previous ritornello in the oboe part for a bar and a half) becomes at b. 61 merely an overlapping of two reiterations of the opening gesture. What is extraordinary, though, is the changing and developing function of choir 2, which sets out as merely a complement to the tenor’s opening phrase. The text is perhaps a clue to why its role changes so dramatically: the tenor’s resolve to ‘watch

with Jesus', in a metaphorical impersonation of what Jesus asked of his disciples, is explained by choir 2 as something that will lead to the eradication of our sins (their 'falling asleep'). So the splitting of the text between choirs 1 and 2 (as designed in Picander's libretto) puts the latter in the role of drawing a deeper point out of what the tenor (i.e. choir 1) states. This is very different from choir 2's role in the opening chorus where it is put in the role of a questioning believer who lacks the insight of choir 1. The choir 2 sections grow into more individualized musical statements, so that, by the middle of the piece, these take on the character of an independent inventive complex (drawing out a specific theological conclusion, 'Drum muß . . .' – 'Thus to us his meritorious suffering must seem truly bitter yet, however, sweet').

Both roles (responsive and fully independent) are reiterated in the closing section, therefore subverting the normally symmetrical balance of the da capo style. The 'foreign' element in the opening ritornello (i.e. that which is harmonically static) becomes first an opportunity for dialogue and later grows into its own independent entity. Yet there is no sense of organic synthesis in the way all these roles are recapitulated in the final section, they are merely left as they are: the complete ritornello with its static bars back in place, the dialogue, and the new independent section for choir 2, the implications of their dialectic left tantalizingly open. On the other hand, there is a sense that, vocally at least, the polarities of the two choirs have changed: choir 2 completes the tenor's final line at b. 69 and has the last word (this is the only occasion in both Passions where a solo vocal line has no cadence of its own; [Example 5.9](#)). This is perhaps parallel to the way the sharp and flat polarities of this Passion as a whole are reversed in its latter half (see p. 233).

Later dialogue movements contain similar dualisms of active and static elements. In 'So ist mein Jesus nun gefangen' (MP 27a) there is a – by now typical – 'holding pattern' based on the opening appoggiatura motive at bb. 9–10, something that could well have been omitted with b. 8 leading straight into b. 11. However, the interpolations of choir 2 ('Laßt ihn, haltet, bindet nicht!') initially cut across the Fortspinnung section of the ritornello, the static section reserved for the second line of the main text, 'Mond und Licht ist vor Schmerzen untergangen' (bb. 25–34), where it is greatly extended into two five-bar segments (this is the longest extension of any of the static passages in the Passions). Only at the third interpolation of 'Laßt ihn, haltet' (bb. 43–4) does choir 2 cut across the static material, as if to show that the disparate elements can be recombined in various ways, and that although the dualistic character might stem from the same mode of

65

Oboe I

Tenor solo

Continuo

68

Oboe I

Tenor solo

Continuo

Soprano, Alto

Tenor, Bass

Continuo

Example 5.9 Matthew Passion, aria 'Ich will bei meinem Jesu wachen', 20, bb. 65–71, choir 2 completion of the solo tenor's line

thought as the dialogue of forces, the two concepts do not have to be directly co-ordinated.

The notion of the two sets of forces developing in different ways is again exploited in the dialogue movement opening Part 2, 'Ach, nun ist mein Jesus hin' (30). Here, though, the static element is not a part of the opening instrumental material (itself incomplete, breaking off with an imperfect cadence in b. 12). Instead, it coincides with the vocal entry (bb. 13–17) where the long held note seems to hold up the flow of the music before joining in with the opening phrase (see p. 87). As usual, though, the interruption seems to portend the entry of choir 2, although this otherwise has nothing in common. Indeed, this movement perhaps exemplifies the most independent material for choir 2 in any of the dialogues of the Matthew Passion. With its text strongly inflected by the Song of Songs ('Wo ist denn dein Freund hingegangen, o du Schönste unter den Weibern?'; 'Where has your friend gone, O you most beautiful among women?'), we gain a sense of the alto of choir 1 as an

individualized figure observed from outside, the 'beautiful woman' to whom choir 2 refer (therefore Picander's 'Zion' is objectified by the 'Gläubigen', 'the believers', of choir 2). What is particularly noticeable is not that the choir 2 sections relate to the choir 1 material (as they did, at least initially, in 'Ich will bei meinem Jesu wachen', 20), but that the gestures of the observers actually have an effect on the target of their questions, that is, on the alto and orchestra of choir 1.

There is a hint of this at the return to choir 1 after the first interpolation, where there is a degree of imitation between the voice and the melodic lines of the instruments (bb. 46–53), something which has not been part of the choir 1 textures so far. In other words, the concept of imitation seems to have been taken over from the idiom of the choir 2 section. An even more explicit connection is evident at the final alto entry in bb. 99–100, where the running bass established in the previous choir 2 section seems to be taken over directly by the basso continuo of choir 1 (this sense of the continuo of choir 2 influencing that of choir 1 is particularly evident in later versions of the work where each choir receives a separate team of continuo players). As in 'Ich will bei meinem Jesu wachen', the lengths of the choir 2 sections are unstable, but, rather than growing, as in the earlier dialogue, here they decrease (from 17 to 13, then 11 bars), as if recognizing that their influence on choir 1 requires progressively less effort. The choir 1 sections, on the other hand, more predictably fall into multiples of four, beginning at 16, then dropping to 8 and finally – as if to compensate for the shortening of the choir 2 sections – two segments of 24. Zion thus seems to gain confidence from being objectified by the faithful, who, in their third utterance, state that they will join her in seeking Jesus. In all, then, there is a sense that the two sets of forces, through their striking separation of musical content, their occupation of subject and object positions, their relative shortening and lengthening, together suggest an increased sense of resolve. Yet the literal return of the opening strain for the alto at the end (repeating directly bb. 12–28) still seems to leave things open; that which is identical with something heard earlier in an aria has never sounded so absolutely the same yet different, simultaneously.

The splitting of forces into two choirs as a way of deepening the believer's consciousness through a division into subject and object finds a parallel in one of the 'ordinary' monologue arias, 'Blute nur, du liebes Herz' (8). Here the static element is the extraordinarily mannered pattern of staccato and slurred notes in the upper instruments, accompanied by viola as the bass, which interrupt the 'main' theme (which is so obviously derived from the shape of the opening words, 'Blute nur'). It therefore

occurs twice in succession (b. 1.3 to the end of b. 2, then b. 2.3 to the end of b. 4), and could be omitted without destroying the sense of the *Vordersatz*. When the singer enters, the contrast between the active and expressive vocal gesture and the almost mechanical interpolations that hold up the motion becomes even clearer. The interpolations remain in the B section (albeit reduced by half a bar), the only element retained from the A sections. Again the effect is to suggest a subject–object separation: perhaps the interpolations are the heart, ticking along in its own way, or even the blood dripping as it would be seen by a detached observer. Either way, there is a strong contrast between the highly emotive gestures of the soprano, a subjective embodiment of the words ‘Blute nur, du liebes Herz’, and the mechanical interpolations, as if the same phenomenon is being experienced from two points of view simultaneously. This dialectic greatly enhances the way the concept of sorrow is experienced, in passive and active ways together, but it does not determine precisely what the outcome should be.

Some conclusions

Bach’s starting point for virtually all his self-standing movements is that the music should present an exploration and prolongation of the inventive complex (whether a fugal subject and its countersubjects, or a ritornello) and in as exhaustive a manner as possible. In this respect, the music is classically rhetorical in the way that the choice of a rich and productive ‘invention’ or topic is essential to the success of the oration. There is almost a metaphysical and moral element to this too: the more exhaustively the potential of the musical material is researched, the more ‘real’ it seems to become, as if disclosing more of the ultimate nature of matter;²⁸ this could also be interpreted as the imperative to make the most of what has been received, the Christian’s acknowledgement of his God-given talents and the intention to bring them to the most fruitful issue, without wastage.

In one sense, this could imply a departure from the stricter, Augustinian, side of Lutheranism, by which human works are not accorded even the potential that they could improve the world at hand, or temper the

²⁸ This perhaps has something in common with Spinoza’s conception of matter, reality and perfection; see my ‘“A Mind Unconscious That It Is Calculating”? Bach and the Rationalist Philosophy of Wolff, Leibniz and Spinoza’, in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 60–71.

fundamentally flawed human condition, which is redeemable only through God's grace. In another way, this attitude might also seem to imply an orthodox, studious, dutiful composer, who would produce bland music of exemplary perfection. However, there is something utterly radical in the way that Bach's uncompromising exploration of musical possibility opens up potentials that seem to multiply as soon as the music begins. By the joining up of the links in a seemingly closed universe of musical mechanism, a sense of infinity seems unwittingly to be evoked. And, paradoxically, to the extent that each piece is related to assumed universals, each becomes a striking particular, bringing its own series of relationships and its own ordering of events.

Where there are dualist elements (something doubtless endemic to the emerging and fashionable *galant* music of the 1720s), these are again integrated in a way that never involves a pre-packaged synthesis or some kind of facile resolution. If there is ever any kind of synthesis or resolution, this is the listener's business: the music is successful for the listener if it is 'used up' and consumed in the act of performance and listening. Bach's contribution is to offer us the sense of an order that lies just out of the reach of fully modern sensibilities, one that sets up some keen expectations of fulfilment but which somehow seems to retain a sense of openness and unexpectedness. This is music that was surely intended to invite us to adhere to the implications of its text and religion, but which, because of its dialectical nature – indeed, its very evangelical purpose of not just moving but also *changing* the listener – can slip its historical moorings and perform any number of roles within a broad history of reception.

Afterword

Have I really achieved what I set out to do in this study of Bach's Passions? Is this anything more than a reasonably thorough – if sometimes perverse – study of these works, adorned with various cultural metaphors (ones that, many might believe, are surely more ephemeral than Bach's music)? I have certainly tried to use a very wide range of historical, philosophical and theoretical sources, although anyone familiar with this sort of literature will realize that most of the figures with whom I have engaged come more from the mainstream of thought on modernity than from its sensationalist borders. If it still seems that I should rather have produced a more systematic guide to the Passions, somehow revealing 'the truth' of Bach's genius, I would certainly have failed in my enterprise, on virtually every level. For the attitude I have been adopting would tend to stress that concepts such as 'a systematic guide', or of a form of universal, transcendent, truth lying in art, are themselves historically conditioned. The value of this music lies, I claim, not in any universal revelation it might offer (such a notion is perfectly understandable as a form of belief, but not necessarily as scholarship), but in the way it can imply a powerful dynamic relating to the modern condition. While much about this music has proved to be valuable throughout many eras within this broader condition (its highest point of appreciation being perhaps in the nineteenth century, which was in some ways the zenith of modernity), I suggest it is particularly significant in embodying the way many movements in modernity have interacted with forms of thought surviving from pre-modern practices. This sort of dialogic nature might thus be of particular significance for the margins of modernity (whether in terms of its historical 'completion', its diversification into 'multiple modernities', or its character in those parts of the world to which Western modernity has come relatively late).¹ It is on these sorts of terms that, I claim, this music (and much else from the

¹ As Charles Taylor notes in *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 154, 196, while Europe was the first civilization to develop modernity, the same process can and does work elsewhere, in ways that might interact uniquely with whatever the cultures concerned may bring.

modern mindset) needs to be interrogated and, where appropriate, regenerated through use, practice and thought. Indeed, to continue seeing this music as 'naturally' universal, above all historical movements and trends, and therefore likely to survive any contingent changes in human practice, thought and opinion, is possibly the most efficient way of ensuring its obsolescence. Indeed, the same might be said of other supposed modern 'universals' such as democracy, equality of justice and opportunity – the more they are assumed to be the natural state of humankind, the less likely they are to endure. In the wake of this dangerous form of complacency, I believe that we need to cultivate more awareness of how any form of music we value works in our broader historical environment in order to gauge how and whether it might continue to thrive.

Accompanying the universalizing view of Bach's Passions (and other such musical works) has been the tendency to 'aestheticize' them, to see them as significant independently of their specific religious functions and content, and as somehow valuable in themselves. It is perhaps here that a change has most recently become evident: their religious content seems to have become more important from a scholarly point of view (even if the scholars concerned do not share the type of religion they contain), and it is arguably harder to separate them from considerations of the role and nature of religion in contemporary society. In a sense, this must surely be a return to something of the circumstances in which they were written – as works that are emblematic of a particular identity and array of beliefs. Yet, I might claim, part of the effect and influence of these works in the two centuries after Bach's death has been to transcend the specific dogma of their origins, not by totally erasing the religious content, but by contributing to a specifically modern appropriation of religion. This includes the notion of religion as a 'useful' metaphor, as something directly parallel to the type of art that I am suggesting Bach was creating, relating Western civilization to its origins, to its founding moments and underlying values. Religion (or art) as metaphor accommodates a wide range of beliefs (and non-beliefs) without necessarily demanding any commitment to a specific array of literal truths. What we may be experiencing today, then, is a failure of metaphor, a strengthening of fundamentalism in several guises, and hence a weakening of the productive dynamic of modernity itself. It would be hubristic, at best, to claim that listening to Bach's Passions today will somehow return us to a 'healthy' world of metaphor and of art as a specifically modern transformation of religion. But more thought about the way modern culture evolved and operated in the past could at least help us uncover possibilities for the future that might not otherwise be

obvious. Indeed, the acknowledgement of forms of life and thought from the past, something that modernity has traditionally tended to counteract, might itself be of specific importance today, not least because the legacy from the past now includes certain aspects of modernity itself.

All this, of course, opens up many more lines of enquiry, particularly in terms of the history of reception of this music. How do different environments respond to different aspects of this sort of music, especially music that is – if my claims are correct – so flexible by virtue of its intensely contrapuntal and dialogic nature? It would be interesting to look at Mendelssohn's celebrated restoration of the Matthew Passion in the light of some of the themes I have developed. For instance, he took a different approach to constructing the figure of Jesus, by stripping away surrounding arias rather than intensifying the surrounding subjects. By shortening the work to make it more compatible with the length of contemporary symphonic works, Mendelssohn rendered it more cohesive and consistent from a musical point of view. Later developments of the work included its translation into English and its use within a larger public context, one which helped engender a new form of sentimental piety. While the Passions were, for both religious and dramatic reasons, unlikely to be interpreted as operas throughout much of the nineteenth century, there were clearly ways in which the Passions fitted into the newer Wagnerian conception of music drama. So, beginning with Busoni in the 1920s, both Passions were soon the object of a number of potential (and a handful of actual) stagings. The advent of 'historically informed performance' brought further challenges, the traditional hermeneutic injunction to understand artworks according to the intentions behind their creation now seemingly extended to every parameter of performance. To some, this was a new opportunity to realize qualities and resonances in the works that had lain dormant, while to others it represented a failure of cultural nerve, a lack of confidence in the inherited methods of musical interpretation. Most interesting of all would be to take into consideration the extraordinary blossoming of interest in the music of Bach and other prominent Western composers in the Far East, specifically in Japan, Korea and China. These are countries that have developed their own forms of modernity (together with the concomitant advantages and disadvantages this might bring) in an extraordinarily short period of time. If there is any empirical evidence to support the connections I propose between music in the Western 'classical' canon and the imperatives of modernity, here is surely where it is to be found.

While a searching study of the Passions' reception would greatly complement, confirm and modify the themes of this study, in the course of

writing it became increasingly clear that I was doing something different from examining how this music has had actual effects in actual historical situations. What I have been attempting to examine is the way this music as it survives in notation is the product of broad historical conditions and, with such conditions in mind, opens up the *potential* for various forms of hearing and reading. In this sense, I am working somewhat contrary to one particular trend in recent musicology, which tends to view music as entirely inaccessible 'in itself' and understandable only in the light of the communities or traditions that receive it. Indeed, the revolution against the concept of 'the music itself' was one of the headiest rallying cries of the New Musicology (the US-led regeneration of the discipline in the late 1980s and 1990s). I am trying to develop a rather more nuanced model here by suggesting that 'the music itself' does indeed have the capacity to elicit a particular range of reactions, at least under the broader conditions of modernity. These conditions and Bach's notated achievement work in a circular relation; each is at least partially dependent on the other and therefore not independently open to direct empirical verification.² What I would also affirm is that this sense of circulation is itself of a piece with the broader conditions of modernity, that any positive form of reception is part of a dialogue that this music already presupposes. Indeed, the analytical and hermeneutic framework within which I describe and explain this music is of a piece with these same conditions. Finally, I have not presumed to prescribe what should happen to, or with, this music in the future, but hope at least to have sketched out some of the grounds on which it can be valued. Perhaps, in turn, both the contemplation of these fascinating works and the immediate effect they can have in performance might also add a little to the debate about which elements of modernity are still vital to sustaining our extraordinarily complex contemporary condition.

² On the concept of the circulating reference and its relation to the history of science, see Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope – Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), esp. p. 150.

Appendix | Movement numbers and titles in the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* editions of the John and Matthew Passions

John Passion

Part 1

- 1 Chorus: Herr, unser Herrscher
- 2a Recitative: Jesus ging mit seinen Jüngern
- 2b Chorus: Jesum von Nazareth
- 2c Recitative: Jesus spricht zu ihnen
- 2d Chorus: Jesum von Nazareth
- 2e Recitative: Jesus antwortete
- 3 Chorale: O große Lieb
- 4 Recitative: Auf daß das Wort erfüllet würde
- 5 Chorale: Dein Will gescheh, Herr Gott, zugleich
- 6 Recitative: Die Schar aber und der Oberhauptmann
- 7 Aria: Von den Strikken meiner Sünden
- 8 Recitative: Simon Petrus aber folgte Jesu nach
- 9 Aria: Ich folge dir gleichfalls
- 10 Recitative: Derselbige Jünger war dem Hohenpriester bekannt
- 11 Chorale: Wer hat dich so geschlagen
- 12a Recitative: Und Hannas sandte ihn gebunden
- 12b Chorus: Bist du nicht seiner Jünger einer
- 12c Recitative: Er leugnete aber und sprach
- 13 Aria: Ach, mein Sinn
- 14 Chorale: Petrus, der nicht denkt zurück

Part 2

- 15 Chorale: Christus, der uns selig macht
- 16a Recitative: Da führeten sie Jesum
- 16b Chorus: Wäre dieser nicht ein Übeltäter
- 16c Recitative: Da sprach Pilatus zu ihnen
- 16d Chorus: Wir dürfen niemand töten
- 16e Recitative: Auf daß erfüllet würde das Wort
- 17 Chorale: Ach großer König

- 18a Recitative: Da sprach Pilatus zu ihm
18b Chorus: Nicht diesen, sondern Barrabam
18c Recitative: Barrabas aber war ein Mörder
19 Arioso: Betrachte, meine Seel
20 Aria: Erwäge, wie sein blutgefärbter Rücken
21a Recitative: Und die Kriegsknechte flochten eine Krone
21b Chorus: Sei begrüßet, lieber Judenkönig
21c Recitative: Und gaben ihm Backenstreiche
21d Chorus: Kreuzige, kreuzige
21e Recitative: Pilatus sprach zu ihnen
21f Chorus: Wir haben ein Gesetz
21g Recitative: Da Pilatus das Wort hörte
22 Chorale: Durch dein Gefängnis, Gottes Sohn
23a Recitative: Die Juden aber schrieen und sprachen
23b Chorus: Lässest du diesen los
23c Recitative: Da Pilatus das Wort hörte
23d Chorus: Weg, weg mit dem
23e Recitative: Spricht Pilatus zu ihnen
23f Chorus: Wir haben keinen König
23g Recitative: Da überantwortete er ihn
24 Aria: Eilt, ihr angefochtenen Seelen
25a Recitative: Allda kreuzigten sie ihn
25b Chorus: Schreibe nicht: der Juden König
25c Recitative: Pilatus antwortet
26 Chorale: In meines Herzens Grunde
27a Recitative: Die Kriegsknechte aber
27b Chorus: Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen
27c Recitative: Auf daß erfüllet würde die Schrift
28 Chorale: Er nahm alles wohl in acht
29 Recitative: Und von Stund an nahm sie der Jünger
30 Aria: Es ist vollbracht
31 Recitative: Und neiget das Haupt
32 Aria: Mein teurer Heiland, laß dich fragen
33 Recitative: Und siehe da, der Vorhang im Tempel zerriß
34 Arioso: Mein Herz, indem die ganze Welt
35 Aria: Zerfließe, mein Herze
36 Recitative: Die Juden aber, dieweil es der Rüsttag war
37 Chorale: O hilf, Christe, Gottes Sohn
38 Recitative: Darnach bat Pilatum Joseph von Arimathia

- 39 Chorus: Ruht wohl, ihr heiligen Gebeine
 40 Chorale: Ach Herr, laß dein lieb Engelein

Matthew Passion

Part 1

- 1 Chorus: Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen
 2 Recitative: Da Jesus diese Rede vollendet hatte
 3 Chorale: Herzliebster Jesu, was hast du verbrochen
 4a Recitative: Da versammelten sich die Hohenpriester
 4b Chorus: Ja nicht auf das Fest
 4c Recitative: Da nun Jesus war zu Bethanien
 4d Chorus: Wozu dienet dieser Unrat
 4e Recitative: Da das Jesus merket
 5 Recitative [arioso]: Du lieber Heiland du
 6 Aria: Buß und Reu
 7 Recitative: Da ging hin der Zwölfen einer
 8 Aria: Blute nur, du liebes Herz
 9a Recitative: Aber am ersten Tage der süßen Brot
 9b Chorus: Wo willst du, daß wir dir bereiten
 9c Recitative: Er sprach: Gehet hin in die Stadt
 9d Recitative: Und sie wurden sehr betrübt
 9e Chorus: Herr, bin ichs
 10 Chorale: Ich bins, ich sollte büßen
 11 Recitative: Er antwortete und sprach
 12 Recitative [arioso]: Wiewohl mein Herz in Tränen schwimmt
 13 Aria: Ich will dir mein Herze schenken
 14 Recitative: Und da sie den Lobgesang gesprochen hatten
 15 Chorale: Erkenne mich, mein Hüter
 16 Recitative: Petrus aber antwortete und sprach zu ihm
 17 Chorale: Ich will hier bei dir stehen
 18 Recitative: Da kam Jesus mit ihnen zu einem Hofe
 19 Recitative [arioso]: O Schmerz! hier zittert das gequälte Herz
 20 Aria: Ich will bei meinem Jesu wachen
 21 Recitative: Und ging hin ein wenig
 22 Recitative [arioso]: Der Heiland fällt vor seinem Vater nieder
 23 Aria: Gerne will ich mich bequemen
 24 Recitative: Und er kam zu seinen Jüngern

- 25 Chorale: Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh allzeit
- 26 Recitative: Und er kam und fand sie aber schlafend
- 27a Aria: So ist mein Jesus nun gefangen
- 27b Chorus: Sind Blitze, sind Donner in Wolken verschwunden
- 28 Recitative: Und siehe, einer aus denen
- 29 Chorale: O Mensch, beweine deine Sünde groß

Part 2

- 30 Aria: Ach, nun ist mein Jesus hin
- 31 Recitative: Die aber Jesum gegriffen hatten
- 32 Chorale: Mir hat die Welt trüglich gericht'
- 33 Recitative: Und wiewohl viel falsche Zeugen herzutraten
- 34 Recitative [arioso]: Mein Jesus schweigt zu falschen Lügen stille
- 35 Aria: Geduld
- 36a Recitative: Und der Hohepriester antwortete und sprach zu ihm
- 36b Chorus: Er ist des Todes schuldig
- 36c Recitative: Da speieten sie aus
- 36d Chorus: Weissage uns, Christe
- 37 Chorale: Wer hat dich so geschlagen
- 38a Recitative: Petrus aber saß draußen im Palast
- 38b Chorus: Wahrlich, du bist auch einer von denen
- 38c Recitative: Da hub er an, sich zu verfluchen
- 39 Aria: Erbarme dich
- 40 Chorale: Bin ich gleich von dir gewichen
- 41a Recitative: Des Morgens aber hielten alle Hohepriester
- 41b Chorus: Was gehet uns das an
- 41c Recitative: Und er warf die Silberlinge in den Tempel
- 42 Aria: Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder
- 43 Recitative: Sie hielten aber einen Rat
- 44 Chorale: Befiehl du deine Wege
- 45a Recitative: Auf das Fest aber hatte der Landpfleger Gewohnheit
- 45b Chorus: Laß ihn kreuzigen
- 46 Chorale: Wie wunderbarlich ist doch diese Strafe
- 47 Recitative: Der Landpfleger sagte
- 48 Recitative [arioso]: Er hat uns allen wohlgetan
- 49 Aria: Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben
- 50a Recitative: Sie schrienen aber noch mehr
- 50b Chorus: Laß ihn kreuzigen
- 50c Recitative: Da aber Pilatus sahe

- 50d Chorus: Sein Blut komme über uns
- 50e Recitative: Da gab er ihnen Barrabam los
- 51 Recitative [arioso]: Erbarm es Gott
- 52 Aria: Können Tränen meiner Wangen
- 53a Recitative: Da nahmen die Kriegsknechte
- 53b Chorus: Gegrüßet seist du, Jüdenkönig
- 53c Recitative: Und speieten ihn an
- 54 Chorale: O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden
- 55 Recitative: Und da sie ihn verspottet hatten
- 56 Recitative [arioso]: Ja freilich will in uns das Fleisch und Blut
- 57 Aria: Komm, süßes Kreuz, so will ich sagen
- 58a Recitative: Und da sie an die Stätte kamen
- 58b Chorus: Der du den Tempel Gottes zerbrichst
- 58c Recitative: Desgleichen auch die Hohenpriester
- 58d Chorus: Andern hat er geholfen
- 58e Recitative: Desgleichen schmäheten ihn auch die Mörder
- 59 Recitative [arioso]: Ach Golgatha
- 60 Aria: Sehet, Jesus hat die Hand
- 61a Recitative: Und von der sechsten Stunde an
- 61b Chorus: Der ruft dem Elias
- 61c Recitative: Und bald lief einer unter ihnen
- 61d Chorus: Halt! laß sehen
- 61e Recitative: Aber Jesus schrie abermal
- 62 Chorale: Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden
- 63a Recitative: Und siehe da, der Vorhang im Tempel zerriß
- 63b Chorus: Wahrlich, dieser ist Gottes Sohn gewesen
- 63c Recitative: Und es waren viel Weiber da
- 64 Recitative [arioso]: Am Abend, da es kühle war
- 65 Aria: Mache dich, mein Herze, rein
- 66a Recitative: Und Joseph nahm den Leib
- 66b Chorus: Herr, wir haben gedacht
- 66c Recitative: Pilatus sprach zu ihnen
- 67 Recitative [arioso]: Nun ist der Herr zur Ruh gebracht
- 68 Chorus: Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder

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